

# A WORK BEGUN

*The Story of  
The Cowley Fathers in India  
1874-1967*

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# 1

## *Beginnings*

As long ago as 8 August 1859, the Founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist, Father R. M. Benson, had thoughts of doing mission work in India. On that day he shared these thoughts with the Warden of St Augustine's College, Canterbury, when he wrote:

I may perhaps take this opportunity of mentioning to you my own plans. I purpose as soon as certain matters of business set me free, to go out for a twelvemonth to the bishop of Calcutta, and my design is to gain experience before setting up a Collegiate Association, which I have long desired to see established.

I want some men to join me in a devotional college in the N.W. Provinces, living upon our own funds, as much in poverty as possible, and as much orientally in every habit and mode of life as possible.

We should have no connection with any Society, but be simply amenable to the bishop. . . . I feel very strongly that missionary work ought to begin with men, and not with money. It pauperizes and paralyses the missionary status when men are agents of a monied Society, and not simply dependent on him to the extension of whose kingdom they are devoted. . . . The College would have its daily offices of prayer and frequent eucharists, and would be a witness for Christ to the heathenism around, and a place from which prayer should be continually ascending on behalf of the heathen. As a witness, it would be in the eye of the world insignificant amidst the vast population of an Indian city, but the habitual prayer would make it acceptable to God, and he will draw to us those whom he wishes to train for himself.

If our members allow, there would be always a certain number

resident, carrying on the offices of the Home, and two and two we should go out on missionary journeys into the country.<sup>1</sup>

Father Benson concluded this letter with the hope that he would be able "to organize some such work as this in the course of the next two years, when I have more fitted myself for the undertaking". But this was not to be. The letter to the Warden of St Augustine's became, not a plan for a Collegiate Association for mission work in India, but an outline sketch for the foundation of the Society of St John the Evangelist which came into being on 27 December 1866. Into the Rule of this Society many of the ideas of this letter were incorporated, but the intention of Father Benson to be a missionary in India was never fulfilled. In spite of two further attempts, this part of his ambition was frustrated.

The first of these attempts was made about 1860. At the same time a plan was made to build an extensive new town on Cowley Common and Father Benson was given the task of organizing the church life in this new town. His response to this challenge is summed up briefly: "the sudden marking out of Cowley Common for an extensive town made me feel I must stay at home and not go to India".<sup>2</sup>

And again, when he had done much to establish church life in this town and felt that he could be spared, he was prevented from going, both by his bishop and by a petition from members of his own congregation. He wrote of this on 28 September 1873, "I am not going to India. I asked the bishop and he thinks best not."<sup>3</sup>

But although not able to go himself, Father Benson made preparations for the members of his Society to do so. On 29 November 1873 a party of two professed Fathers of the Society, one of them Father Page, with two laymen and an Indian boy who had been staying at the Mission House, embarked for India. Father O'Neill was also ready to go, but he followed later. This advance party landed in Bombay on 6 January 1874.

So the work of the Society of St John the Evangelist in India began with an act of obedience, and obedience marked the pattern of its work throughout the next ninety-three years. It was an

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Father Benson of Cowley*, M. V. Woodgate (Geoffrey Bles), pp. 30-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

obedience which took much the same shape as the obedience of the Founder of the Society. For him it was an obedience to the Church whose commands were made known to him through the bishop. For the members of the Society it was also an obedience to the Church, and for them her commands were made known through the Rule under which they lived and the wishes of the bishops under whom they served. In the Rule of Life Father Benson described obedience as an offering made to God which would eventually be received back in "the glorious resurrection power of his divine acceptance". The offering of this kind of obedience has already been made by the Society in India and already there are signs of this promised return from God in the form of resurrection power and the advancement of his kingdom.

The advancement of the kingdom of Christ was from the beginning the purpose of the Society's work in India. This was not the advancement of the Society itself, nor even the advancement of the Church. The purpose of advancing the kingdom of Christ explains many of the actions and decisions of the Fathers which would otherwise be perplexing. It explains why they were so reluctant to bring any pressure to bear on Indians to join the Society, why they were content to wait God's time and not make strained efforts for quick results, why they tolerated certain periods of tension between themselves and the local church without feeling that it was necessary to withdraw. The kingdom for them was greater than the Church, and it was primarily the kingdom they served.

Again, their work for the kingdom made it much wider than a piece of mere ecclesiastical extension. Realizing that the kingdom of Christ includes the kingdoms of this world and that Christ is engaged in a work of total renewal, some of the Fathers engaged in agriculture, industry, education, besides their more obvious missionary work of preaching and organizing congregations. The result was that, when they finally handed over their work to the diocese in September 1965, it was not just a piece of ecclesiastical organization but a miniature of work for the kingdom of Christ, with men and women included who shared this vision of advancing this kingdom towards its full growth in India.

It is true that much of what will be recorded in this book will be past history made by men who worked and died years ago, but

this vision of theirs is still true; and in days when Church structures are being doubtfully examined their broadly based conception of working for the kingdom of Christ may point the way to a true renewal of the Church and her work in the future.

Father Benson always insisted upon the living growth of a vocation. He wrote:

We live by the call of God. It is not because he has called us, but because he is calling us; and we need to hear that voice speaking in us constantly, and with increasing power. We cannot fail of our vocation if we are listening for that voice, but we may fail of our vocation by neglecting to hear that voice. . . . We must go on following the voice that calls us.<sup>1</sup>

God called Father Benson and his Society in many ways and he continues to call. To begin with, Father Benson heard God's call in the frustration of what he called "his own plans". Then he came to recognize that call in the frustration of those plans and their replacement by something quite different. So it was with the Society. Apart from Father O'Neill, its members never realized the ideal of living "as much in poverty as possible," nor were they ever able to achieve anything very oriental in their habit and mode of life. Instead, they often found themselves in control of large and expensive institutions, they had to emphasize their European detachment in order to be a disinterested centre to people of many communal backgrounds, and in the place of itinerant missionary work they often had to wait in one place while the work grew around them in forms they would not themselves have chosen. Like their Founder, vocation assumed for them many and unexpected forms.

This book will describe vocations of the past now fulfilled. But it will also shed light on the present and perhaps point forward to a future of greater hope than the present, without this light from the past, could justify. The same voice still calls us and the Society away from our own plans to plans reshaped by the creative power of God. The same voice calls the Society to new forms of work for the advancement of the kingdom. Through many uncertainties, through many changes of well-laid plans, we continue to wait on the voice that has called, is calling, and will go on calling us.

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Vocation*, R. M. Benson, Mowbrays, 1939.

## 2

# *Background*

In a letter to Father O'Neill, Father Benson described India as "good enough to die in". This is indeed true of parts of India, those parts where housing is inadequate or non-existent, where village hygiene and water supplies are totally insufficient for the great city populations, where food is inefficiently distributed, and where disease is exploited without any pretence of treatment or compassion. But there are many parts of India where this is not true. Those parts are by no means "good enough to die in"; they are glorious to live in and witness to the marvellous beauty of God's creation. Both parts of India have always formed the background of the Society's work in Bombay and Poona.

The poverty of the majority of the population of India is now a constant theme, both of television programmes and advertising. But there is a difference between the poverty of the villages and the great cities such as Bombay and Poona. In the villages, poverty has a dignity and a simplicity which in some ways resembles religious poverty, and it has its obvious blessings in terms of light-hearted freedom. But in the cities the poverty is of the kind described by Father Benson as "grinding poverty" and it brings only squalor and despair. Some of the worst manifestations of this kind of poverty are to be found on the largest scale in Bombay and Poona. They have always formed the background of the Fathers' work in these cities and have been a source of horror and frustration, for the problem has always been on such a vast scale that no attempt by them to meet it has ever gone

beyond first-aid help to a few. Among the outstanding places where this poverty was to be seen are the Victoria Terminus and the Docks area in Bombay and certain parts of Panch Howd.

Kipling's description of Lahore Station at night is a type of all large Indian railway stations and particularly of the Victoria Terminus, Bombay. He describes how Kim and his lama came to Lahore station, just before dawn.

They entered the fort-like station, black in the end of night, the electrics sizzling over the goods yard where they handle the heavy northern grain traffic.

"This is the work of devils", said the lama, recoiling from the hollow echoing darkness, the glimmer of rails between the masonry platform and the maze of girders above. He stood in a gigantic stone hall paved, it seemed, with the sheeted dead—third-class passengers who had taken their tickets overnight and were sleeping in the waiting rooms. All hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals, and their passenger traffic is regulated accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

Victoria Terminus of course is bigger than Lahore station and is never in darkness. In the day-time it is lit by brilliant sunshine; at night by the glare of electric lamps. The sheeted dead are there in large numbers, not only third-class passengers with their families but immigrants from famine and disturbed parts of India, boys engaged in selling fruit on the trains and carrying baggage, coolies in their red shirts with their special badges, the destitute and homeless of the great city. Here grinding poverty, loneliness, and misery were always to be found, and often St Peter's Hostel was called to accept and clothe one or other of the boys picked out of the crowd in the hope that he could be persuaded to settle down in the disciplined life that was offered. How often, alas, the offer was made in vain and the boy gravitated back to the freedom of the station after a few days of hostel life.

The long road running parallel to the docks was called Frere Road. It was broad and long and straight, with a pavement running down the left side towards Mazagon. Immediately after the massacres of 1947 vast numbers of refugees from the Punjab came into Bombay and thousands of them, wives and children, squatted along this pavement. Here they put up small tents and there for several years they tried to reproduce the life of the

<sup>1</sup> *Kim*, Rudyard Kipling (Macmillan), p. 37.

villages from which they had come. The authorities provided a totally inadequate water supply and practically no sanitation, and under these conditions their children were born and their old people died. All the intimate processes of life were carried out in full public view along this road. It was something which was seen every time we went into the central part of Bombay and one could do no more than pray and agonize. Years afterwards army lorries descended on these squatters and they were forcibly resettled outside the city.

It was in the later years of the Fathers' work in Bombay that this horror was to be seen, but in other parts of Bombay, such as the warren of streets around Crawford Market, the same poverty on a smaller scale went on.

In Poona there was grinding poverty of another kind. This was to be seen some four hundred yards from the Mission House, where the local authorities had erected a block of tall flats and filled them with innumerable families. These flats had been fitted with a form of twentieth-century plumbing, but unfortunately, after the bursting of the Khadakvasla dam, the town water supply was totally insufficient to fill the tanks on the top of this building. This meant that for most of the time this modern plumbing was out of action. So the people returned to their village customs. They quarrelled around a communal tap and used the opposite side of the road as an alternative to the unworkable plumbing. It is true that a sweeper was on duty most of the time but, in spite of his efforts, passing that building in the early morning to say Mass at St Mary's was an experience of squalid poverty never to be forgotten.

And then in India the Fathers worked against a background of exploited disease and deformity. Sometimes this was demonstrated on station platforms, where sick and deformed people were paraded to ask alms. Sometimes in the streets deliberately injured animals were displayed. Sometimes it was a leper on a small cart drawn through the street by his relations and friends. A doctor in charge of a leper hospital near Bombay once told me that many of his patients could not afford to lose their leprosy. It was literally all their living.

All this was part of the background of the Society's work, a problem too vast and complicated for solution at any but a

government level. But it was not the whole of the background. There was light to contrast with these shadows and a wonder of nature to enjoy. India was also glorious to live in, as the Fathers who worked there were only too ready to agree.

Many of the Fathers who made this discovery were specially equipped to investigate and describe the wonder of the life around them, both scientifically and artistically. Outstanding among them were Father Wain and Father Bean who made valuable studies of natural life around Poona and Bombay and collections both of bees and butterflies which have earned the admiration of experts. Father Wilkins, with less specialization, had a zestful enjoyment of a wide area of India and its wild life and a particular skill in describing it to others, as this reply to an enquiry made just before his death shows. I wrote asking for a list of the more common animals in India and this is the typical Father Wilkins' note which came back in his inimitable script, with capital and small letters used as he thought best:

Domestic animals: Buffalo, cow, goats, sheep etc.

Wild animals: Tiger, leopard, smaller jungle cats, hyaena, jackal, hanuman or larger monkey (grey with white whiskers), bonnet monkey (brown), mongoose, tree squirrel, porcupine, buck and deer, asiatic (maneless) lion preserved in N.W. states, Kathiawar etc., elephant (only in Mysore and Assam), rhino (only in Terai and Burma).

Birds of prey: Kite, vulture, and tawny eagle.

Other birds: Bulbul, coppersmith, tailor-bird, flycatcher, mynah, horn-bill, minivet, golden oriole, sun bird.

Trees: I am bad at trees and plants—teak, cork, tamarind, banyan, nim, pipal, etc.

Chief venomous snakes: Cobra, russell's viper, Phursa, krait, green tree snake (sub-lethal usually, can produce a temperature with its bite), the long rock python (harmless to man). 75% of snakes are harmless.

This may not satisfy the expert, but as a rough outline of what Bombay and Poona had to offer it gives a good idea of what there was to enjoy.

Many of the other Fathers took a more general interest in their

surroundings and there are many letters from Matheran, the nearest hill station to Bombay, to prove this.

Father Williams writes from there in 1919, whilst sharing a holiday with Father O'Brien.

First there are the monkeys. Father Moore complains that they are becoming sadly Europeanized, but they still retain a good deal of their native charm. One came the other day and sat on our roof with his hands on his knees, and when we threw things he only opened his mouth wide and grinned. They are really quite handsome creatures with their silver grey fur and black faces and beautiful long tails.<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult to recognize these monkeys as the langur monkeys described by Father Wilkins. The letter goes on to describe the antics of the lizards at night. "The lizards are always in ambush, and Father O'Brien and I have seen some exciting chases after flies and beetles as we sit reading or writing between supper and compline."<sup>2</sup>

Matheran was one of the hill stations, some sixty miles from Bombay, where the Sisters of All Saints had a large bungalow called the Hermitage and in their garden there was a smaller one capable of taking two Fathers. To reach Matheran was an adventure in itself. After leaving the train at Neral, there were two alternatives. One could walk eight miles, climbing some two thousand feet into an increasing coolness, or one could travel many more miles in a toy-like mountain train and reach the same spot in almost the same time. The decision depended on one's reserves of energy, or the age and capacities of one's companions.

At Matheran station there was a joyous meeting with the coolies sent by the Sisters to carry the luggage and escort the visitors to the Hermitage. I shall always remember the welcome given at that station by the coolies to a white-bearded Indian sadhu. It was like a paragraph from Kim. To him the coolies knelt, and when they had touched his feet they led him off to the rickshaw which became a kind of triumphal car in which he was carried through the bazaar to the admiration of all. No Father, I believe, ever had this kind of welcome, but they were given the feeling that from this point their holiday had begun and the coolies shared their happiness as they walked through the thick dust to the Hermitage.

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, September 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



The bungalow was all a holiday bungalow should be. It had a wide veranda which filtered the sunshine to a cool, refreshing stream of gold. The rooms were large and had earth floors, overlaid with cow dung, the best of all materials for the flooring of an Indian house. The beds were of the charpoy variety, wonderfully firm and ventilated, with curtains to discourage mosquitoes, and there was a huge earthenware pot holding really cold water in one corner of the room. The dining room was large and the table seemed always in use, either receiving meals, or having them taken away, or waiting to receive them. And always on our arrival the first cold drinks of the holiday were there to welcome us and assure us that it had begun.

Father Williams in his letter mentions some of the pleasures of Matheran. Just sitting in this bungalow and being entertained by monkeys who never did the same thing twice, reading and writing in an oasis of silence, having time to stretch one's legs and have one's talk out: these were some of the pleasures of this bungalow, besides meals enjoyed at leisure and the chance to explore undisturbed the deeper levels of sleep.

But there were even greater pleasures to be enjoyed outside, when the strength lost in Bombay returned. Matheran compressed into the space of a few square miles most of the infinitely various natural beauty of India. It was an island in space, rising some 2600 feet above the surrounding plain, cut off from the civilized world by steep-sided cliffs which in some places descended more than 1000 feet to the next ledge below. It was a self-supporting island, mysteriously surrounded by trees. At its centre was a market, replenished daily by the agile Thakur people who climbed up by such strange paths as Jacob's Ladder to bring their wares, perfectly balanced on their heads, to be sold. There was a rather uncertain and temperamental water supply and sometimes electric current to light very dim bulbs. Running across the island were innumerable footpaths, designed for the use of men and horses only and impossible for the use of any horseless carriage. At certain points along these paths the trees had been cut back to reveal breath-taking vistas with such names as Artist's Point, Panorama Point, Echo Point, and a host of others.

All these paths waited to be walked over, sometimes in long stretches, when there was much energy to spare and a cool breeze

moved through the trees, sometimes in short strolls, when nature stimulated thought rather than action; and the beauty insisted upon being slowly absorbed.

Father Williams concludes his letter from Matheran with feelings I could never share. He writes: "Tomorrow I hope to be back at Poona, and I shall not be sorry, though it has been very pleasant here."<sup>1</sup>

I was never able to leave Matheran with those kind of feelings. I always left with the deepest sorrow of heart and great forebodings. The station on the morning of return was always cold and dark. The courageous little train plunged through the gloom towards the dawn, and dust and heat rose from the plain below. And at Neral there were over-busy and disgruntled coolies, a European-style restaurant, and (what I used once and never again) a porcelain kind of shower bath which squirted tepid water when it felt inclined and left me more moist and dejected than before. I was always sorry to leave Matheran and viewed my return to Poona, Bombay, or England as a descent into my own particular form of *purgatorio*.

This does not imply that there were not good things in Bombay and Poona, once the noise and confusion and heat had been overcome. Father Wilkins found these good things from the beginning of his life in India, for soon after his arrival he wrote:

I am still in Bombay, but I am to go on to Poona on Monday, July 9. Then I must settle down seriously and solidly to learn Marathi. India has completely captured my heart from the very first. I am indeed thankful for the privilege of being sent here. I believe that one will be able to love these people, both Indian and Anglo-Indian very much.<sup>2</sup>

Bombay was not so attractive to me from the very first. I was introduced to it in December 1945 from the deck of the *Mauretania*, as we waited to be ferried to the landing stage and taken on to the Army barracks at Colaba. All from that position seemed noise and heat and confusion; yet there was also a background of good things to come in the form of brilliant sunshine, a deep blue sky, and the spire of St John's Church, Colaba, standing out like a light-house in the harbour. The seven years spent in this city

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, September 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1928.

enabled some of these good things to be further discovered. Now they live in the memory, whilst the noise and heat and confusion have faded away, and they go on supplying a form of recollected emotion as satisfying as anything given by Matheran. In this memory two good things stand out with special prominence: Mazagon pier in the cool of the evening and the compound of St Peter's School.

Mazagon pier is in the heart of the dock area and the centre of the fishing village from which Mazagon got its name. In spite of the large dockyard and the mass of buildings and the railway, this part of Mazagon has preserved its identity. Here one could stand and watch the fishing boats being skilfully brought into harbour by one man who timed the process of furling the one sail and then leaping down to fend off his boat from the harbour wall to perfection. Within moments of tying up his boat he would be hurrying up to the fish market with his catch. Here men sat, washing and mending their nets. Here one day, in an emergency, one of them spliced to perfection some rope needed for the school boxing ring. Here one day a boy dived into the harbour and recovered my camera case which I had given up for lost. Across the harbour from this pier could be seen the mysterious island of Elephanta and from the direction of its caves would come at evening a cool breeze which always brought peace. It was a short walk from St Peter's School to this pier and often one used to walk there to empty anxiety into the sea and return renewed for the further problems which waited to be solved.

The compound of St Peter's School was a complete contrast. This was in the heart of the urbanized part of Mazagon, flanked on one side by trams and on the other by an oil-drum factory. The combined noise from both sources was deafening and almost continuous, but the longer one lived there the less conspicuous it was. What mattered was not the noise outside the compound but the life within. Here, compressed into an area of a few acres, was in miniature the life and work of the whole Society. In one corner was the Mission House where the religious life was lived; opposite was one of the main blocks of buildings which formed St Peter's School and Hostel, where the educational work of the Society was done; and further away was St Peter's Church where the missionary work of the Society went on. There were other

buildings too: St Paul's Hostel for Indian apprentices, more of St Peter's School, and the Junior Dormitory buildings. In the middle of all this was the playing field where hockey, football, and cricket, all of a high standard, were played. Within this compound the Christian life in its most intense and inclusive form was lived, and during the six years I shared in it there were inspired moments when the conception of the Church and the kingdom was almost harmonized. One moved from St Peter's church to the activities of the school, from games to hard manual work in the hostel, and back again each evening to the church for evening prayers. St Luke could describe the variety of people who heard the great deeds of God in Jerusalem as "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians . . ."<sup>1</sup> There was a similar variety within this one compound, and with the Society as a living centre they became one family. It was a miracle which only a Christian centre could have produced, and to live for six years against such a background was a privilege for which one can never cease to be thankful.

Brother Robert in a letter dated 27 March 1920 sums up the essential difference between Bombay and Poona. He writes: "I came here (Panch Howd) last Thursday with Father O'Brien and find at last I am really in India and at the heart of things. Hitherto I had only reached Bombay, an island adjacent to the mainland, and not India at all."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this was a too-sweeping excommunication of Bombay, but certainly Poona was at the heart of things, the heart of the things of the Indian people and of nature. All the way from Bombay, by the wonderful ascent of the Ghats, this sense of penetrating the heart of things increased, and then the final journey from the station to the Mission House, along a road which Brother Robert said "fairly beats the Bay of Biscay", proclaimed that this heart had been reached.

The people of Poona were quite different from those of Bombay. Here they lived confidently in their own civilization, with the

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2. 9-11.    <sup>2</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, June 1920.



European ways of Bombay almost absent. Here they would invite you as a guest to their own homes without embarrassment, and generously give their guest a full share in their family life. Many experiences of this kind of hospitality come back to mind and most clearly those frequent visits I was allowed to pay to the home of my Marathi pundit, Mr Kanetkar.

This Indian Brahmin taught many missionaries Marathi and for a long time worked at the Language School at Mahableshwar. When I first met him he was coming to the end of his active teaching and with fewer pupils was able to give more individual treatment. For me this meant long talks on his own prayer and his attitude to the Christian faith, and invitations to his home.

These visits to Mr Kanetkar's home were growing experiences. The first was very formal. His wife remained in strict enclosure and handed cold drinks from behind a curtain. I saw a grandson or two, but no one else. During other visits, other members of the family came and talked. My last visit in 1965 was a breaking down of all barriers. There was on this occasion music on a sitar and rhythm on two drums and Mrs Kanetkar, a gracious woman of golden beauty, came in and talked whilst she gave us our refreshments.

Mr Kanetkar was a man of prayer who followed the interpretation of Raja Yoga given by Vivekananda. He had his own small prayer room in his house, where he practised prolonged meditation. As we studied the Gospels together in Marathi, he often used to remark on the similarities of the teaching in them and his own faith. We trusted each other and waited, sharing each other's knowledge of God and growing into the truth.

This family was one of a host of Indian families with whom we had a deep understanding and friendship in Poona. They made no attempt to imitate European ways, and in their company we could each become more genuinely ourselves. Ideas of conversion seemed out of place. It was much more a question of waiting for the fulfilment of St Paul's prayer:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 4.13.

By the time I came to explore Poona and its surroundings, the Fathers had abandoned their preaching tours in the villages which, from their letters, gave so much pleasure. Instead, I had the excitement of cycling through Poona with Father Huntley, a formidable performer, who could ride through the town without having to dismount for cow or goat or pedestrian or any such thing and expected his companion to do the same. And there were also long walks with Father Bean.

This letter from Father Playne, dated a trifle ostentatiously "In camp, Rajewadi, Poona District, December 13, 1921", reveals the Father and Brother Arthur having a wonderful time as they carried on their mission.

Brother Arthur and I have our green tent under a mango tree close to an irrigation well, now ominously low. In this part there were good early rains, but most of the bajri (grain) crops came to nothing through lack of rain. However we have seen a good deal of stacked bajri, and the oxen treading out the grain. . . . There is a fine crop of jawari (grain) adjoining the well by our camp, and the owner and his sons watch it all day from a raised platform about six feet off the ground. The heads are filling out and offer a tempting juicy morsel to the sparrows and other birds. The men make ear-piercing whoops and use a large sling to frighten them away, when they come too close. The old man puts the major portion of his clothing on a post to act as a scare-crow, and sits bare-headed in the sun, leaning against the post, occasionally taking a turn round the patch and waging severe warfare on any particular venturesome party of sparrows. . . . This morning several youths were there (at the village gymnasium) and appeared to be carrying out their morning devotions in the intervals of gymnastic exercises. One heard the slapping of limbs which is the inevitable accompaniment of "talim" and sometimes the ringing of bells and snatches of bhajans.<sup>1</sup>

This is descriptive writing of a high order by one who was often over-conscientious and yet on this occasion, under his mango tree, had surrendered himself to an enjoyment of the good things India had to give.

Father Bean and I savoured the beauty of India in long evening

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, February 1922.

walks around Poona. These often took us through the cantonment, with St Mary's Church standing out as a central landmark, past spacious bungalows to the wide open training grounds which led on towards Nanded and Khadakvasla. Further afield, along the canal, there were miles of near jungle countryside, with market gardens forming a ribbon of cultivated land on either side. In the evening the air was alive with the sound of men encouraging their bullocks to lift the heavy leather bags full of water from the wells to water the land. And as they did so, a mist would rise in the evening coolness as we walked home.

Sinhgad was a good deal further away and a visit to this delightful hill station came no more than twice a year. This fort, the lion fort, was built by the Moguls on a hill some five thousand feet high and about twenty miles from Poona. It had been captured by the Maratha hero, Shivaji, in the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century was captured and dismantled by the British. Since that date it stood empty, except for a few houses and a large bungalow owned by the Sisters with a small hut adjoining for the use of the visiting Father. As at Matheran, part of the holiday was reaching the top. There was no choice between walking and a train. The choice was between walking and being carried in a four-man litter, a humiliation to which I never succumbed. The climb was steep and took at least an hour, and at the top there was the same coolness as at Matheran but no coolies to meet the traveller who walked across the flat top of the fortress to his silent cottage overlooking the lake and Poona.

Scupoli once described silence as a "strong fortress". This was the kind of silence offered by Sinhgad. For many it was an unfailing mount of Transfiguration to which they went to have their vision restored and from which they returned to the plain below, strengthened for another period of ministry.

One can easily exaggerate the difficulties of the India background. Such places as Sinhgad, Matheran, Khandala, Karla, and Malad were of quite a different kind. They ministered to those who went to them and built into the memory visions of glory and glimpses of a peace which no other experience in India or elsewhere could ever take away.

A Bishop of Bombay once said that India did much for those who came humbly to learn from her. This was indeed true and she

ministered in many ways, above all through her natural beauty and her people. One aspect of this ministry was death. It was, as Father Founder wrote, a country to die in, and Indian experiences led to a death to such absurdities as self-importance and self-confidence. But it was also a ministry of life. Here was a salve to open blind eyes, a power to lift the heart, a glory to shine through the darkest mind and reveal God.

In a remarkably understanding book on his experiences of India, Rupert Croft-Cooke puts these words into the mouth of a colonel on the edge of retirement. He speaks for many more than himself.

Yes, I have liked India. I've been happy here. I've tried to understand it—as most of us have, with more or less success. To picture us, the old koi-hais, as altogether ignorant and insular is nonsense. Ignorant in the face of the titanic task of knowing this sub-continent, yes. Insular against the closed continuous esoteric life of Hind, yes. But not the leather-skinned monsters of the caricaturists at home, I assure you. I have known a few hundred British officers in the Indian army, and I never knew one that did not respect his men, grumble at his life, and feel something akin to love for this rich and complicated country. I never knew one, from whichever crowd, Mahrattas, Madrasis, Punjabis, Dogras, Sikhs, who did not speak of his soldiers as though they were his younger brothers. "You ought to see our little chaps." "There's nothing to beat ours", whatever scum of whatever gutters have been pushed out on to the square in uniform. We're not, we're really not, the hidebound old codgers they suppose at home. I think most of them feel pretty well as I do about the place and the people.<sup>1</sup>

Rupert Croft-Cooke concludes with this remark: "How insufferable this attitude must seem to the India of today. Yet it represents the viewpoint not of the coarser-minded British soldier but of one of the more thoughtful and imaginative of them."

If India could make such an impression on a soldier at the end of his service in the Indian Army, how much deeper the impression she made upon those Fathers of the Society who gave the best years of their life to her service.

<sup>1</sup> *The Gorgeous East*, Rupert Croft-Cooke (A. M. Heath), p. 81.

## 3

*Crucial Events*

The Society's work in India coincided with crucial events in the history of that country. It began during the aftermath of the serious uprising in 1857, and the last of the Fathers left in 1967 when the government of an independent India was struggling with the problems of famine and economic reorganization from within and facing the pressure of the external forces of hostile Pakistan and enigmatic China.

Not all the events of this period affected the life and work of the Society. Until the arrival of Lord Curzon as Viceroy (1898-1905) there were few political events which impinged on the Society. This was a period of reorganization and uneasy peace. But with the coming of Lord Curzon and his detailed articulation of English policy opposition began to harden. Of his policy it has been written: "India in his view was incapable of ruling herself and had been entrusted to Britain as a sacred charge by Providence. It was necessary for Britain to govern India as if . . . for ever."<sup>1</sup> This attitude was popularized by the writings of Kipling and the attitude to the Empire which developed during the closing years of Queen Victoria.

Naturally these specific attitudes evoked opposition from politically-minded Indians. The period of the Society's life and work in India largely coincides with the expression of this opposition, its organization, and its final achievement of independence in August 1947. From these movements the Society

could not stand aside. Sometimes indirectly and often by deliberate choice and policy, the Fathers found themselves involved in actions which compelled them to share in the crucial events of the struggle.

This account will attempt to select from these events the particular occasions when the Society was most nearly involved in the political life of India and to show why certain decisions were made. The person around whom most of these events took place was Mahatma M. K. Gandhi, a man who combined the gifts of a shrewd politician with the longing to see the all-pervading Spirit of Truth, face to face. He explains the reason for his attempt to combine these two seemingly incompatible vocations in his own biography, when he writes:

To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.<sup>1</sup>

Over and over again, one finds the Fathers confronted with the same problems as confronted this Indian leader in his quest for Truth. We see him erring on what appears the side of an over-involvement with politics: we sometimes see the Fathers committed to what seems to be an over-detachment. But the line was always finely drawn and we must beware of over-simplifying their problems from our present vantage point.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* writes:

Later I discovered and am still discovering up to this very moment that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. . . . This is what I mean by worldliness—taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experience and helplessness. It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly in the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in Gethsemane.<sup>2</sup>

These words may well be applied to the life of the Society in

<sup>1</sup> *An Autobiography*, M. K. Gandhi (Housman), p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (S.C.M.), p. 169.

<sup>1</sup> *New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. XII, p. 212.

India. Although its members were vowed to the religious life, none of them lived in India as the type of *homo religiosus* Bonhoeffer rightly condemns. They were all in various ways immersed in the failures, experiences, and helplessness of a country passing through an agony of recovery from the catastrophe of the so-called Mutiny of 1857 to the achievement of Independence in 1947 and beyond. They took life in their stride, accepting their share in the political movements in which they lived, yet always with that wise detachment which made them available to men of all parties and trusted by representatives of the many fearful and often conflicting communities who still make the tensions of Indian life.

A letter, written by Father Wilkins on 4 July 1946, illustrates the way in which the Society participated in the life of India:

I have been reading Beverley Nichols' *Verdict on India* which I found in our library here. I am afraid it was a late reading, as the book came out some time ago. Indeed, a number of doctors in our hospital mess had asked me whether I had read it, and what I thought of it. It is, I am sure, clever and acute in many ways, and there is much sympathy in it for the poor and hungry. I cannot help thinking that *Verdict* is a rather ambitious title, because anyone who means to judge India and her people needs a good many years to sift facts and evidence, and this book was written on a short acquaintance. . . . Of course, one like the author of this book, mixing, as he does, with many political leaders will naturally see that side of the question and will not be so conscious of the ordinary, everyday life that goes on, year in and year out, quite regardless of the political strife. He thinks of the whole country as being in one constant turmoil. Living and working as we do in the midst of the poor, inarticulate multitudes, we see chiefly the daily struggle for existence, the constant anxiety for the future, for food and clothing, for house and employment. We are ourselves rightly anxious for a just and right settlement, but these are not our only preoccupation.<sup>1</sup>

In this letter are all the principles which guided the Fathers in sharing the life of India: a reluctance to come to facile and premature decisions, a wide sympathy with all classes and a special regard for the poor and inarticulate multitudes who always make up the main ingredient of human life. These principles we find

guiding the response of the Fathers to every crisis in this period of Indian history.

After the chaos of 1857 the Government of India Act of 1858 placed the control and administration of India on new and more stable foundations. Queen Victoria became Empress of India, and India, in the words of Disraeli, became "the brightest jewel in the British crown". A long period of peaceful convalescence seemed ahead.

In many ways there were signs to justify this assumption. There were available for Viceroys, Governors, and Civil Servants men of the highest calibre. The army was strengthened and began to use India as one of its main training grounds. Higher education was developed and there were plans to recruit the Civil Service in part from graduates trained in these new universities. A gigantic scheme of railway construction was started and this promised both to unite the country and also to reduce the dangers of famine and civil disorder. The late Lord Beveridge in his book *India Called Them* has given a detailed description of the India of this time as seen through the eyes of a sympathetic civil servant and his wife. The picture is full of hope. It echoes the attitude of Bishop Milman when he wrote: "It is impossible to see India without a stir of the heart. The number of their population and their character are unusually attractive and awakening." This stir of the heart was felt by the Fathers of the Society as they began their work, and they made their first task that of trying to understand the people they had come to serve. One of the ways they did this was by building up a library on Indian affairs and using it as an instrument for growing to understand the problems of the country and entering into the lives of its people.

The libraries of the Mission Houses in Bombay and especially in Poona witnessed to the work of the Fathers in growing to understand the country they had come to serve. There was an adequate language section, dealing mostly with Marathi. Father Huntley became an expert in later years in the colloquial form of this language. Other Fathers persevered with the help of language pundits and achieved enough fluency to preach and take services in this language. It was not an easy language to master and even this degree of proficiency cost many hours of hard work.

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, August 1946.

Then there was a history section with a complete series of biographies of Indian Viceroys. There was also a complete set of the *Bombay Gazette*. This was in addition to books on Indian religions and natural life. How deeply many of the Fathers through these libraries entered into the lives of Indian people and their problems can be seen in the letters they wrote home and in such a book as Father Gardiner's *Life of Father Goreb*.

In those early days identification with the lives of the people in India involved making contact with a great variety of races, communities, and languages. This called for great sympathy and a capacity to make relationships in many different ways. Father O'Neill was one of the Fathers to achieve this. In spite of his deep sympathy with the poor native people and his desire to reproduce the conditions of their life in his own, he also made close contact with the cantonment population at Indore, and especially with the soldiers of the units stationed in that area. When he died he was carried to the station church and graveyard by the soldiers he had served. Father Page in his letter of 5 September 1882, describing Father O'Neill's death, relates how he was taken to the house of Major Carey, an associate of the Society, during his last illness and he remarks: "It was meet the soldiers should carry him, who had so often preached to soldiers."<sup>1</sup>

In those early days, the Fathers accepted the form of mission work open to them at the time, both the cantonment with its largely European elements and the Indian Christianity of the mission compound. Under both conditions they preached the gospel and they were welcomed by both types of congregation. There was also another form of pastoral work which opened up with the growth of the railways. At such railway centres as Lonaula there was a small community of railway staff and to them the Fathers went at regular intervals. And then there were the students in Poona and always, as Father Wilkins mentioned, the poor and inarticulate multitudes for whom the Fathers had a special love and increasing responsibility.

India was not for long content to remain in political dependence upon rulers sent from England. As early as 1885 there were stirrings towards political freedom. In that year the National

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, October 1882.

Congress was formed, largely through the work of an Englishman, Alan Hume, and the great Indian leader, Bal Gangadhar Tilak. At its first meeting this party formulated a demand for *swaraj* or independence which was finally granted more than sixty years later. This demand was put in another form by Tagore, when he said: "Of course, we Indians wouldn't rule India as well as the British – not for a good many years, but we've the right to choose to rule ourselves, badly if need be." And with many misgivings the Fathers reluctantly agreed with him.

The Indian Congress grew slowly, with much suspicion from both Europeans and Indians; and it is probable that without the help of outside events it would have collapsed. Two events raised it from the level of one of many political parties to the stature of the great Indian national party of freedom. These events were the first World War and the catastrophe of Amritsar. The first event seriously weakened Britain and reduced her ability to meet the growing administrative demands of India; the second provided a kind of catalyst which brought together the growing discontent of the Indian people.

What happened at Amritsar was a symptom of a serious and growing uncertainty among the rulers of India. Never more than a small *corps d'élite*, these three to four thousand highly-trained civil servants administered the vast and complicated machine of government through a large number of Indian assistants. The war had decimated the class from which recruits to this service were drawn and many of those still in office were strained and near retirement. This was true of Brigadier Dyer, the man who gave the order to fire on the mob in the Jallianwalla Bagh on 13 April 1919.

They were there as a protest demonstration in defiance of an official prohibition. The soldiers were called to disperse the mob. Brigadier Dyer, no doubt with memories of other crises in his mind and determined to act firmly, closed the exits of the garden and then opened fire with machine guns on the confined crowd. As a result, 379 were killed, 1200 wounded, and an outrage imprinted on the memory of Indians which they are never likely to forget. This attack was followed by the imposition of martial law in the Punjab until 9 June 1919 and humiliating forms of punishment.



This incident, like all events in a time of crisis, was exaggerated out of all proportion. One writer said: "In British-India relations it was a turning point more decisive even than the mutiny. . . . The last years of British India were ushered in to the sound of Dyer's guns." This was certainly not the opinion of many people at the time and in the Fathers' letters no mention is made of the incident. But undoubtedly the massacre was a flash-point which exploded a pent-up opposition to certain aspects of British rule in India, and it was used by Congress to transform themselves into a party of national significance. It was also a kind of opening fanfare to the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi who about this time reached the stature of full national leadership.

Only India could have produced such an enigmatic person as Gandhi. He was of Vaisya caste, that is from a business background. Partly educated in the legal profession in England, he served an apprenticeship in fomenting disorder in South Africa, before returning to India in 1915, where he began to apply to the Indian political scene his recently learnt techniques. The principles of these techniques he summed up in the words: *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, and *bartal*.

By the word *ahimsa* Gandhi expressed his principle of non-violence or respect for all forms of life. The meaning of *ahimsa* has been described as:

In human relations . . . the renunciation of violence . . . a mental attitude for which Gandhi found many parallels in the Sermon on the Mount. It also linked itself with that of Jain and Buddhist abstention from taking of life which Hinduism has come to assert as part of its own tradition.<sup>1</sup>

In his political campaign against the British government, Gandhi always advocated the avoidance of force. But his followers did not always understand this part of his teaching and there were frequent outbursts of violence, especially towards the police. Communal riots between Muslims and Hindus disfigured his campaign from beginning to end. Gandhi himself succumbed to this form of violence, the most extreme denial of his *ahimsa* teaching.

Gandhi in his autobiography gives an interesting account of the origin and meaning of the principle of *satyagraha*. He writes:

<sup>1</sup> *India's Religious Frontier*, William Stewart (S.C.M.), p. 63.

The principles called *satyagraha* came into being before that name was invented. Indeed, when it was born, I myself could not say what it was. In Gujarati also we used the English phrase "passive resistance" to describe it. When in a meeting of Europeans I found that the term "passive resistance" was too narrowly construed, that it was supposed to be a weapon of the weak, that it could be characterized by hatred, and that it could finally manifest itself as violence, I had to demur to all these statements and explain the real nature of the India movement. It was clear that a new word must be coined by Indians to designate their struggle.<sup>1</sup>

The discovery of this new word was made the subject of a competition and won by Maganlal Gandhi with the word *sadagraha*. This was modified by Gandhi to its present form, *satyagraha*, and derived from *sat* (truth) and *graha* (firmness). It describes the basic principle by which Gandhi conducted his struggles for political freedom, both in South Africa and India. Such a principle of active, non-violent assertion of truth was admirably suited to the capacity of his followers and when used against the military and the administrative machinery of government in the ways he devised in India it was unanswerable. No wonder it has since been imitated with such success by political movements similarly deprived of effective military force such as the student and C.N.D. protests in this country. It was undoubtedly the most effective instrument through which India won her independence. Gandhi personally employed it with outstanding success through his spectacular fasts at certain critical moments of the struggle.

The *bartal* was a Hindu custom of closing shops and bringing business to a standstill, sometimes as an expression of mourning, sometimes as a protest. Gandhi added this weapon to his armoury and often encouraged the people to emphasize their opposition in this way. The *bartal* could be a most disrupting factor in the life of the community and often came to a head in serious communal disorder.

The attitude of the Fathers to Gandhi and his programme was equivocal. There was no doubt that much against which he protested needed reform and that his principles of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* had much of Christianity in them. But it was also known

<sup>1</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* (Housman), p. 266.

that Gandhi, having carefully examined Christianity, had deliberately rejected it in favour of a synthetic religion which combined elements of Hinduism, the Koran, and the Bible. This description of evening prayers at Sevagram illustrates the strange religion which he evolved and explains the acute problem it presented to Christians who while approving of so many of Gandhi's ideals could not renounce their exclusive commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord.

As dusk fell daily at Sevagram, the whole company of workers, old and young, teachers and pupils, gathered in orderly ranks on the ground, for evening prayers, a devotional period in which readings from Hindu scriptures, the singing of devotional songs, and silent prayer might well find a place along with the singing of a Christian hymn like "Lead kindly light" and the recital of the Lord's prayer. In later years it became the custom to use this period for an exhortation from Gandhiji himself, which in free India was frequently broadcast by All India Radio.<sup>1</sup>

The Fathers were in India to preach the Christian faith and to shepherd Christians who needed clear-cut teaching, if they were going to survive in a welter of so many religions. They could not compromise with this part of Gandhi's teaching. Neither could they align themselves with a policy that led to the development of communal bitterness and so many acts of lawlessness. This incompatibility was especially acute at certain periods of the campaign.

Ever since 1906, when the All-Indian Muslim League was formed, the Muslim community reacted against Gandhi's movement and this reaction went on growing until it led to a division of the country into India and Pakistan and the tragic massacres of 1947. The Fathers had many sympathetic contacts with Muslims as well as Hindus and other communities. They could do no more than observe a neutrality and take any opportunities which came their way to reconcile the opposing parties.

Again, when Gandhi chose to launch his "Quit India" campaign during the 1942 threat of invasion from the Japanese, the Society was in loyalty bound to support the government. It did this in the very practical way of sending both Father Wilkins

and Father Huntley to be Army chaplains. The Society was still further alienated when Subhas Chandra Bose formed the Indian National Army from Indian prisoners of war in Japanese hands and threatened to use this force to share with the Japanese army the invasion of India.

These were perplexing days when duty seemed to involve for the Fathers the most difficult of all tasks, that of standing aside from the main currents of life and waiting. This task ended with the conclusion of the war and the decision of the British government to grant independence to India. From then onwards the Fathers were able once more to enter the main stream of Indian life and to make a positive contribution, as they trained their people to take new responsibilities in the independent India.

At the end of World War II discontent in India began to find expression in violent and ominous forms. In 1946 there were two serious mutinies: one among the ground and maintenance staffs of certain R.A.F. stations and the other in the Indian navy which turned its guns on Bombay and for a short time threatened the city. To these were added an intensification of the "Quit India" campaign.

Mr Attlee and his Labour government reacted swiftly. Lord Wavell was recalled and his place taken by Lord Louis Mountbatten who was sent out with instructions to negotiate for the complete transfer of British power in India not later than June 1948. He soon discovered that the tension was so high that undue delay in granting independence would be dangerous, and so he advanced the date by one year. He also agreed to the formation of the separate Muslim state of Pakistan.

Independence came to India in an atmosphere of extreme violence. There were tragic inter-communal riots in the Punjab where some 600,000 were killed and some fourteen million refugees flooded the cities. A year later Gandhi was assassinated by a Poona brahmin, Godse. Gradually Nehru, strongly supported by Lord Louis Mountbatten, restored order. In 1950 the new Constitution was accepted and the first of a series of Five-Year plans was introduced to give direction and targets of progress to the economy. When the first real test came to independent India with the Chinese invasion of 1962 and the war with Pakistan in

<sup>1</sup> *India's Religious Frontier*, William Stewart (S.C.M.), p. 62.

1965, the country was strong enough to survive. There is still a long way to go before India achieves the political and economic strength needed for playing her full part in the Far East, but she is now heading in the right direction and can depend upon the prayers and support of all those who shared the anxiety and uncertainty of her early days of independence.

The Fathers of the Society were among that number and with the coming of Independence were called to move their allegiance from a British to an all-Indian government. This was not always easy, and for some of the Fathers it was harder than for others. Father Williams accepted the changes wholeheartedly and gave himself to the work of giving a Christian interpretation to the new and popular concepts of independence, freedom, and the right demands of both God and Caesar. Being himself a trained historian, he was able to do this in depth and with scholarly detachment. Those of us who heard him expounding these truths from the pulpit of the Holy Name church were privileged to watch a man confidently taking life in his stride and applying the gospel principles to yet another aspect of it. In doing this he was carrying out a duty which had been foreseen and described some fifty years before by the Rev. H. E. Fox, a C.M.S. General Secretary, who wrote: "It is our duty to follow God's policy, to wait upon God and watch; neither to lag behind nor run in front. I know that in human politics this would be called 'opportunism' but I believe that in divine politics opportunism is a token of the highest faith."<sup>1</sup>

Other Fathers found this form of taking life in their stride more difficult and adjusted less swiftly and completely. This was so in Bombay where the future of St Peter's School was threatened by the language controversy in 1952, when the Bombay government tried to forbid the use of English as a medium of instruction. There was also the case of the pictures of national leaders in the dining hall which needs further description.

It happened in this way. Over a period of many years the portraits of many celebrities had accumulated in the school dining hall. These included national leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru, local leaders such as Maharaj Singh and Oscar Brown, and international leaders such as the Queen and Prince Philip. When this

<sup>1</sup> C.M.S. Newsletter, July 1968.

hall was being redecorated, the Father who was also principal of the school decided to weed out these portraits, leaving the Queen in the splendour of her coronation robes. Fortunately he heeded the warning of a member of his Indian staff who suggested that this treatment of the portraits of the national leaders could easily be misunderstood. A compromise was reached and they were hung in the cloister outside and even added to by members of the school art class. The warning was not unfounded. In due course members of the C.I.D. came to investigate. It was as they had been told. The portraits of the national leaders had been removed and only the Queen remained. Where, they asked, were the others? It was a moment of special satisfaction to open the door and reveal them in the new gallery, so much more suitable for leisurely contemplation without noise and distraction.

Father Williams would not have allowed such a situation to arise. This Father with less wisdom did, but perhaps he showed a special form of taking life in his stride by the way the difficulty was overcome and a necessity turned to a glorious gain.

This isolated incident was no more than an exception to an unbroken relationship of trust and cooperation between the Society and the powers that be. Both before and after Independence this prevailed, with governors like Lord Lamington and Lord Lloyd, with the Maharaj Singh and his delightful wife. Government departments were generous with their building grants, education inspectors were helpful and encouraging. And this relationship of mutual trust extended to the parents of many communities who gladly entrusted their children to the Fathers' care. St Peter's compound was a kind of United Nations Organization of all varieties of nations and religions. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this mutual trust was shown when the Khadakvasla dam burst in 1962 and thousands in Poona were homeless. For a time the Fathers' Mission House became a centre of refuge for crowds of men and women and children who came there until other accommodation could be found. A similar experience occurred during the serious communal riots in Poona in 1965.

Bishop John Robinson, whose thinking was strongly influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writes this about the concept of holy worldliness:

Holy worldliness involves constantly walking on a knife edge: it is

only too simple to slide into becoming too worldly or too other-worldly—and neither is holy, though the latter has often been hailed as sanctity. To be concerned but not involved is just as great a temptation to the Church as to be involved but not concerned.<sup>1</sup>

The record of the Society's contact with the life of the world in India at a time of special crisis was full of all these dangers. It was a question of always walking on a knife edge. There were the dangers of over-involvement and exaggerated detachment; there were the temptations to be academically concerned from a safe position of religious enclosure. The true balance was mostly maintained. The Society was fully involved and concerned with every moment of this exciting period of Indian history and played an important part in the growth of the Indian people towards Independence.

<sup>1</sup> *On Being the Church in the World*, J. A. T. Robinson (S.C.M.), p. 18.

## 4

### *Bombay*

There was no Gateway of India to welcome Father Page and his companions when they landed in Bombay on 6 January 1874. That imposing but rather meaningless structure was built some forty years later to welcome King George V and Queen Mary. But Bombay was itself a gateway to these Fathers, an open door through which they and many other members of the Society were to go in and out for the next ninety years, as they fulfilled their vocation in different parts of India.

St John teaches that in all mission work our Lord is the one who goes before his servants. "The good shepherd goes ahead and the sheep follow because they know his voice."<sup>1</sup> This was true of the Society's work in India. They followed after the Christ who had already gone before them.

This discovery of Christ already immanent in the people to whom we are sent has now been made and lies at the heart of all present-day missionary work. It is the secret of the Church and the whole of her ministry to the world. It forms the central theme of Dr R. Panikkar's book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, in which he boldly attempts to show that there is a living presence of Christ in Hinduism. But when the Fathers first came to India this was far from being recognized. Even Father Benson came to admit it gradually. In the early days he could write to Father O'Neill and describe the mysticism of Hinduism as "all rubbish".

<sup>1</sup> John 10.4 (N.E.B.).

But later, in a letter to Father Greatheed, written in 1876, he showed a much wider and more balanced view:

One must act proportionately—not forgetting Hinduism any more than St Paul in his teaching forgot Judaism—not seeking to show how far it is from the truth, but rather to show how much truth it contains, mixed up with all its grotesqueness. . . . Many similarities and much more the primeval traditions of Hindu mythology have, I doubt not, a real resemblance to Christian Truth.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of the Society in Bombay and the rest of India led its members to a similar growth: from an amused contempt of the religions they found already there to a reverent recognition that the light which enlightens every man was shining in India and had not been overcome by the darkness.

But this development was still a long way off when Father Page first started work in Bombay as curate in charge of the church of the Holy Trinity. This was a temporary work, yet very much in keeping with the Father Founder's vision of the Society's work at that time. It involved nothing in the way of institutions and the Fathers lived in a rented house.

After a little more than a year the Bishop moved Father Page to the church of St Peter's, Mazagon, where he had Father Rivington and Father Goreh as his curates. This move led to a protest from some of the local people who were suspicious of the type of churchmanship their new incumbent was likely to bring. The protest, like most protests of this kind, was not important in itself but it led to a letter from the Father Founder to the clergyman concerned which is not only a classic example of the way controversy should be conducted between Christians but at the same time a statement of some of the principles by which the Society always acted in Bombay. The letter is entitled "To a clergyman—A Remonstrance" and dated 10 June 1876. The following is an extract.

I send herewith some numbers of our magazine which contains accounts of our Society in India.

I cannot do so without expressing my regret that a clergyman of the Church of England should have thought it consistent with his duty to take advantage of the Bishop's absence and open a place of worship at

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, selected and arranged by O. Congreve and W. H. Longridge, Mowbrays, 1916, pp. 194-5.

Bombay in opposition to the appointed minister of the district. However great our differences may be, I should think you must feel that there was a greater work to do in India than that of gathering together and urging on the disaffected members of any Christian congregation. However I believe I may say that God has overruled for good the opposition which you have excited against us. . . . Forgive me if I write strongly, for it is with no personal feeling. I shall be only too glad to know that you yourself regret having taken the part you did in our parish. My own desire is not to dwell upon differences, but to work as heartily as may be possible with all who have the same commission as myself from Christ in His Church.<sup>1</sup>

This was indeed Christian controversy conducted by a master. The desire not to dwell upon differences marked the work of the Society throughout its ministry in India, and the Mission House in Bombay became a centre of meeting and hearty cooperation for a variety of Christians. To Father Page the Founder wrote: "There is every cause to be thankful even for the opposition that has been raised against us."

Father Page was well able to look after himself. He was one of the giants of the Society. He came to it after serving as Vicar of a Yorkshire parish and, once professed, was sent out to the most demanding work the Society could offer. Having proved himself under the hardest conditions, he was elected to succeed Father Benson as Superior General of the Society in 1890. When he retired from this office in 1907, he returned to spend the remaining years of his life in India. He died and was buried at Poona in 1912.

In many ways Father Page was the opposite of the Father Founder. He was a man of action, of great organizing ability. In an appreciation published in the November 1912 *Cowley Evangelist*, Father Waggett writes movingly of this Father. It is his power of action that he notes with special emphasis, when he writes:

He was a true and energetic leader and ruler. He could most wonderfully get work out of people. He could lend the impulses of his eagerness in order to bring to a conclusion, or at least bring to the point of effort and production, the preparations, aspirations, collections, in which writing men too often wander interminably. The infirm of purpose know an intense gratitude towards the man who thus lifts them into self-committal, expression, movement. There have not been

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, selected and arranged by O. Congreve and W. H. Longridge, Mowbrays, 1916, pp. 244-5.



many characters in our time stronger than the character of our old Superior.

The Father Founder was also a man of action, of great organizing ability, but of a different kind. Some kinds of organizing power he suspected. Indeed, he once described Satan as "an organizing spirit". His early vision of the work to be done in India had to do with a College celebrating frequent eucharists and regularly saying the offices—with, when numbers permitted, Fathers going out two by two on missionary journeys into the country.

The vast needs of Bombay and his administrative gifts brought Father Page another kind of vision. It was a vision of an institutional form of evangelization and once settled at Mazagon he sketched out a plan for the Society's work in Bombay which was centred around large institutions. In this plan the working of these institutions was to be shared between the Fathers, a group of All Saints Sisters, and a paid staff.

No sooner was the plan formed than Father Page applied himself vigorously to carrying it out. How vigorously is implied in the picture of Father Page at work conveyed in the remark of one of his friends: "Father Page goes about with very much the same activity as when he was in England—as if he were wanting to keep himself warm."

This change in the interpretation of his original plan must have imposed some strain on the Father Founder. We can trace signs of this in some of the letters written by him at this time.

Father Page writes in July 1878:

The people have now subscribed 1,900 rupees out of the 2,000 we asked to meet our grant of 1,000. The remaining 100 will soon be made up. . . . At the meeting we set another stone rolling for an organ chamber and other alterations to the church, promising half the amount required out of the same fund. An architect has given us the plans and an estimate of cost gratis.<sup>1</sup>

This was the true and energetic leader and ruler in action, and in a humorous observation written some time later, the Father Founder makes his comment on this kind of thing: "Delightful division of mankind—seculars, people who give money; religious,

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Magazine*, 1878.

people who spend it . . . I am afraid all the world will become religious, and when there is no one to give, what will become of the religious?"<sup>1</sup> His attitude to over-organized and over-institutionalized missionary work came out most clearly in his warm and uninhibited correspondence with Father O'Neill, where in letter after letter he reiterates the essence of his own life and teaching—"You have not got so much to plant as to grow."

The tension between structural and institutionalized religion and that "simple dependence on Him to the extension of whose kingdom we are devoted" was first apparent in the relationship between the Father Founder and Father Page in the Indian work of the Society, but it continued in varying forms throughout the life of the Society in that country. There was always a tension between the institutional presentation of the gospel and the simple evangelism of such Fathers as Father O'Neill and those who sympathized with his methods. The tensions were transferred to England when Father Page returned in 1890 to become Superior General. He there began a programme of extensive building in Oxford which committed the Society to a much more institutionalized form than the Founder had envisaged. Baron von Hügel taught that there was room within the Church for both an institutional and a mystical element and that the tensions between them when wisely balanced could be healthful. That has certainly been the experience of the Society of St John the Evangelist, both in India and at home, and perhaps it is the price that must be paid for the form of mixed religious life to which it has been called. The story of its life and work in India is a warning of the delicate balance between each form of this life and work and the need for the artist's sensitivity in maintaining the right balance which may enable each to contribute to the one work for the kingdom. There is no doubt that in India the balance was not always kept, with the result that the institutional work at times tended to become over-emphasized and endangered the life of the whole. Certainly when the institutions were finally transferred there were no reserves available for the Society to embark on another form of life and mission in India.

Having decided on an institutional pattern for the Society's work

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, selected and arranged by O. Congreve and W. H. Longridge, Mowbrays, 1916, p. 149.

in Bombay, Father Page started to carry it out with his usual vigour. Two Sisterhoods were asked to send helpers: the Community of All Saints and the Community of St Mary the Virgin. The Wantage Sisters, as they were called, worked in Poona; the All Saints Sisters, under the more immediate supervision of Father Page, were centred in Bombay.

The first contingent of All Saints Sisters arrived in Bombay in December 1878 and settled near the Fathers at Mazagon. Father Page had already laid down the type of Sister he needed: "Those who should come should be thoroughly dependable persons and well-disciplined, able to bear up against the enervating character of the climate, willing and able to work under disadvantages, more ready to sow than anxious to reap."

This was not an easy specification, but this splendid community never failed to supply the Fathers with Sisters to meet this need. Not only in the first part of their service in India did they supply Sisters capable of the most strenuous forms of practical service, but towards the end of their service, when the work of sowing was over and their numbers reduced, they showed a remarkable capacity to grow in the life of prayer. Their last ten years in Bombay, when most of their active and institutional work had been transferred, was a ministry of prayerful waiting during which they reproduced some of the Father Founder's vision of what that work should be. Led by Mother Mildred Mary, herself crippled with arthritis, Sister Rosamund, Sister Clare, Sister Pauline, Sister Lillas, Sister Rosa, Sister Salome, Sister Amy, Sister Mary, and Sister Dorothy Hilda showed a dependability and discipline in the contemplative side of the religious life which equalled if not exceeded the finest practical achievements of the community in India.

And these practical achievements were outstanding.

In January 1882 the Community took over the J. J. Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Bombay. They ran it for almost fifty years and made it one of the great hospitals of the city. Two years later, in 1884, they opened a mission compound opposite this hospital at Umerkhadi. In the same year they took over the Bombay Cathedral School for Girls and made it one of the great schools in India. The next year, 1886, they took over the management of another great hospital, the St George's Hospital. A year

after that they built their own community house at Mazagon and made it a centre for workshops and hostels. Then came the great plague epidemic in 1896 and the Sisters ministered to Christian and non-Christian alike and won the hearts of the people of Bombay.

1896 was the high-water mark of expansion for this Community in Bombay. They now began to expand beyond the city. At Matheran they acquired a rest bungalow appropriately named the Hermitage, and in 1897 they took over the All Saints' School for girls at Naini Tal. Some years later, in 1912, they opened a small mission hospital at Panvel. Finally, when the girls from St Peter's School were moved to Khandala, the All Saints Sisters founded and developed in these ideal surroundings a boarding school which flourished until its amalgamation with St Peter's, Bombay, in 1952.

What a magnificent ally this community was to Father Page in carrying out his schemes for a great mission centre in Bombay. And what a splendidly developed remnant of them was waiting to accept Mother Verena's decision when she came to withdraw the community in 1956.

There was Mother Mildred Mary who, crippled with arthritis, still controlled affairs in the compound. Not only did she solve her own problems but she always had a fund of wisdom to contribute towards the solutions of other people's. In spite of almost constant pain she remained cheerfully in control of every situation. She was flown back to England and died a short while after her return.

Then there was her assistant, Sister Rosamund, whom nothing ever ruffled and who seemed to have absorbed the calm of India without any loss of efficiency.

There was Sister Pauline who as parish Sister moved among the thinning congregation of St Peter's and gave them hope and courage when their church seemed in danger of being swallowed up by the vigorous growth of St Peter's School; and Sister Clare who never gave up her reading and refreshed over-active Fathers with her informed conversation.

What a wonderful team of dependable, mature, and disciplined religious they were, and they remained loyal and undefeated to the end.

In 1956 Mother Verena, the Mother General of All Saints, organized the transfer of the remaining property of the community in India. She formed a trust to ensure that the buildings would continue to be used for Christian purposes and they still make an important contribution to the lives of Christians in Mazagon. The Hermitage at Matheran became a retreat and conference centre for the diocese.

This partnership between the two communities was an epic achievement. It remains as a pattern to be studied by other communities who today may be considering a form of cooperative enterprise. It is against the life and work of the All Saints' community in Bombay that the work of the Fathers of the Society of St John the Evangelist must be told.

St Peter's church was the centre of this work and it is the history of this church which provides the main outline of all its parts.

The first St Peter's church had already been built before Father Page and his companions came to India. It was finished in 1858 on a site near what is now Dockyard Road station. The intention was that it should be a chapel of ease to the large church of Christ Church, Byculla, serving the European population of Mazagon which was largely concentrated in the dock area. In August 1869 a separate parish of St Peter was formed and a government grant of land made for the building of a parsonage and school. When the Vicar of St Peter's, the Rev. W. H. Harper, went to England in 1875, Father Page was placed in charge of the parish.

The church of which Father Page was made Vicar has long disappeared, but there are descriptions of it which give some idea of what it was like. One witness says that it had "a very English look". Anyone who has seen English-style buildings in India can easily add the details. Another says that it was built "primarily for English and Anglo-Indians". This enables us to form a fairly clear idea of its congregation. St Peter's in its later forms always seems to have preserved these characteristics. It always had an English-look, "like a miniature of St Paul's cathedral", someone once said; and its congregation was always English-speaking, even though towards the end of the Fathers' work in Bombay most of the English people had moved from the docks and returned to England.

St Peter's never solidified into a changeless structure and neither did the work around it. There was a continuous growth and the church showed a remarkable tendency, like many another church in the mission field, to proliferate buildings around it. The first of these was a small choir school which was added in June 1876. Its buildings were completed in October 1879. This was followed in 1880 by the beginnings of a community house which had as its one recommendation that it certainly fulfilled all the conditions of religious poverty. I can vouch for the accuracy of this description, for many years afterwards, when it was functioning as the home of a Parsee friend, I had tea in what was once the chapel.

Neither the church nor the school nor this community house survived long. On 23 November 1905 St Peter's church was taken over by the Bombay Port Trust and demolished to make room for extensions. By this time Father Page had returned to England, but his successor, Father Nicholson, was even more vigorously committed to institutional development and he used the compensation to embark on a large-scale development in a new and larger compound some four hundred yards away. Here he began the rebuilding of the church, the school, and the community house. The foundation stone of the church was laid by Lord Lamington, the governor of Bombay, on 19 March 1907. It was ready for use in April 1908 and dedicated on 25 January 1909. The new community house was completed a few months later.

The new church was an imposing but unsuitable building. Like its antitype, St Paul's Cathedral, it had a dome. But unlike St Paul's cathedral, St Peter's dome had to deal with the annual monsoon which brought almost 100 inches of rain in about three months. Almost every year it failed, forming a kind of catchment area to attract vast quantities of water into the building. No amount of pitch and repairs ever succeeded in defeating this volume of water. Inside, the church was decorated with a good deal of Italian marble which tended to break loose with the heat. The style of the church seemed to amplify every outside noise (and how many and various those noises were) and the heat in the middle of the day made the building almost unusable. A 'Three Hours' devotion was as much a physical as a spiritual marathon.

The Fathers tried to use this church for a threefold task in Bombay. It was a parish church in a small parish with a decreasing European and Anglo-Indian population. For several years it was made a centre of Catholic teaching and practice. It was also the school chapel of a school which in later years developed into the major activity of the compound.

By 1956 the parish role of St Peter's was almost over. In spite of valiant efforts to maintain a congregation, the numbers fell, making it impossible to run the church on parochial lines. As an exclusive centre of Catholic teaching and practice St Peter's soon lost its position. Much of what had been started at St Peter's was taken up by St John's, Colaba, All Saints, Malabar Hill, and the cathedral. But as a school chapel it played an increasingly important part, as the institutions within the compound developed. This function of the church was rapidly developed under Father Whitworth (1933-49) and his successors. By the time St Peter's School became independent, with its own board of governors, the school population had become by far the largest part of the Sunday morning congregation. The needs of these boys increasingly controlled the forms of worship and the teaching given in the church. Under Mr Duthie, the church was formally recognized as the school chapel and Father Bishop became its first school chaplain. So smoothly and efficiently was this transformation organized that when the Society withdrew from Bombay the school and the church had been firmly welded into a living whole.

The story of St Peter's church is a classic illustration of the way in which an institutional work gradually outgrows the church by which it was founded and finally absorbs the body from which it came.

We must now trace in more detail this growth of St Peter's School, which began as a small choir school in June 1876. It was enlarged in October 1879 and became a school for other children. In 1891 a boarding house was added. After being temporarily closed during the plague in 1903, it was reopened in 1904. Then came the exodus from the compound in Dockyard Road and the rebuilding of the school in the new compound. On 19 January 1910 it was reopened as St Peter's High School for Boys and Girls. The new boarding house fronting the Mazagon Road was finished in March 1911. About this time, owing to a recurrence

of plague, the All Saints Sisters transferred the girls' school from Bombay to Khandala and there started to build up St Peter's Girls' School where for many years it was a flourishing institution.

Until the arrival of Father O'Brien in 1918 St Peter's School grew slowly under such admirable headmasters as Father Biscoe (1890-6), Father Tovey (1896-1903), and Father Langmore (1903-11). Father O'Brien brought a wind of change. He was impressed by the needs of young Anglo-Indian apprentices in Bombay and to meet them he built a large hostel in the school compound. This helped to solve the apprentices' problem but, like many another solution, it brought even greater problems which were not seriously handled until Father Whitworth took over in 1933.

If Father O'Brien brought a wind of change, Father Whitworth brought a tornado. He reigned in Mazagon until 1949 and during this time the institutions were developed to their greatest capacity.

The character and ability of Father Whitworth have been ably described by his immediate predecessor at St Peter's, Father Wilkins. In his book *With Wings as Eagles* he writes of him as follows:

Father Whitworth gave himself to the task with great energy and strength of purpose, and when he left India more than fifteen years later St Peter's Hostel was more than 120 strong, schoolboys and apprentices. Boys with no homes, boys from bad homes, domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indian boys have been given their chance in life, with a sound education, followed in many cases by an apprenticeship and the happy background of a good religious training. Many served in various arms of the services during the war, some going far overseas in ships of the Royal Indian or Merchant navy.

Their school and hostel days were happy and busy with study, games, housework, and summer camp; and their religion, their worship and prayer, ran like a golden thread through the fabric of their lives. In the old India Anglo-Indians could find a career in government service, railways, telegraphs, police, and the like. In the new India, Bharat, such employments are closed to them and many have been obliged to emigrate. St Peter's has helped many an Anglo-Indian to face this grim future, and it must have been a joy to Father Whitworth on a railway journey in England when the fireman, one of his old St Peter's, Mazagon, boys, sprang from the engine to greet him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *With Wings as Eagles*, B. D. Wilkins, S.S.J.B. Published by The Cowley, Wantage, and All Saints Missionary Association, 35 Great Peter Street, S.W.1, 1916.

Father Whitworth was in the Father Page and Father Nicholson tradition. He believed in the institutional form of missionary work and ably supported by Mr Tom Laver he developed St Peter's into an institution which overshadowed all the other activities of the Society in India. Like all forms of rapid growth this led to tensions with other parts of the work and the balance of the religious life in Bombay was upset. The Mission House was in the centre of a compound which was now in a state of continuous activity. Not only was there a storm of noise and movement breaking against its outside walls, but within, where a few Fathers struggled to be faithful to the Rule, there was a feeling of siege warfare and the sense that one day the fortress must fall. So long as Father Whitworth was in charge he was strong and resilient enough to ride the storm. When he was recalled it became obvious that something must be done to restore a balance between the active and contemplative life.

In June 1949 Father Whitworth returned to Oxford. Father Huntley succeeded him as Superior of the Bombay House and Father Slade became Principal of the St Peter's School and Hostel. He was also made Vicar of St Peter's Church until Father Bean took over in 1952.

During the next six years events took place which relieved the Society of the intolerable strain of the over-developed institutional life of the compound. The pity of it was that when this release came there was insufficient strength left within the community to take advantage of this freedom and develop new kinds of mission work along the lines which were now possible. Both Father Huntley and Father Beasley-Robinson made valiant attempts in this direction, but the Chapter had decided to close the Bombay house and this was done in 1956.

When a large ship is going at full speed on a set course any change of course cannot be made quickly. This was the position at St Peter's School and Hostel in 1949, when the new Principal took over. Indeed, in fairness to the children it became necessary to accelerate the development. Educational standards were rising and after the war better food and clothes for the boys were urgent. It was no longer possible to run the institution on a small and underpaid staff. The government had introduced dearness rates for the staff and these had to be paid. This meant that school fees

had to be raised, and raising fees could only be justified by raising and improving the educational facilities. It was a vicious circle of development. So a science laboratory had to be built, a more adequate staff recruited, and the syllabus brought up-to-date.

All this increased the size and demands of an already over-large institution, yet those involved were caught up in a momentum that could only gradually be brought under control. The decision which had to be taken was whether to destroy the institution by deliberately preventing any further growth, or to continue this growth and to plan such modifications as would make it possible in the future to transfer the management to a body outside the Society. It was the second of these decisions which was taken. From 1949 onwards preparations for this ultimate goal were made, but it was some time before the chances from outside were given which made it possible to move towards this end.

Meanwhile many things had to be done which were often misunderstood.

The school and hostel had to be put on a sound financial basis. In order to do this, numbers had to be increased and the fees raised. The higher fees had to be drawn from families capable of paying them and this meant admitting a more wealthy type of pupil. Again, whilst not decreasing the number of the Anglo-Indians in the school, new communities were admitted ranging from Chinese to Sikhs.

Then the staff and organization of the school and hostel had to be prepared for new forms of administration. This meant that the Principal had first to centralize the control in himself and then choose and prepare others to whom he could delegate his responsibility. The first part of this process was not completed without opposition and misunderstanding. In carrying out the second stage two splendid helpers were found in the persons of Mr Myatt for the hostel and Mr Vaswani for the school. Mr Myatt who had served in the Indian Navy brought all the discipline he had learned in that service to his task as hostel warden. Mr Vaswani, a man of great intellectual gifts and organizing ability, took over the reorganization of the school. Long before the time for transfer was reached, these two men had mastered their work and when the transfer came the new Board of Governors had in their service the nucleus of a staff well able to run both the school and hostel



competently. They continued to serve under the new management with outstanding ability for the next ten years. Mr Myatt then emigrated to England, but Mr Vaswani continues to give excellent service.

As one looks back on those planned days of development towards what seemed such a distant goal, some words of Dr Johnson on the education of children give many of those who shared the task reason to pause. He is commenting on different forms of discipline:

I would rather have the rod to be the general terror of all, to make them learn, than tell a child if you do thus or thus you will be more esteemed than your brothers and sisters. The rod produces an effect which terminates in itself. A child is afraid of being whipped, and gets his risk and there's an end on't; whereas, by exciting emulation and comparisons of superiority, you lay the foundation of lasting mischief; you make brothers and sisters to hate each other.<sup>1</sup>

Both of these methods were widely used at St Peter's in those days. Corporal punishment and competition were the means both of discipline and work. With hindsight to help present judgement, there seems no doubt that these methods were over-used. The result was, although not fully understood at the time, an environment of over-strain which found expression in the individual rebel and in small group movements of unrest. Compared with present-day student troubles, they were on a very small scale indeed. On the whole there was a wonderful family spirit at St Peter's throughout the school and hostel and moments when an *esprit de corps* of a very high calibre was apparent. One outstanding example of this occurred when the boys of St Peter's defeated a boxing team from Deolali school, after seeming certain to be defeated.

After 1952, certain external events began to open up the way towards transfer.

The first of these events was in 1952 and concerned the amalgamation of St Peter's School, Khandala. For some years this school had been going downhill. After the withdrawal of the All Saints Sisters the school was taken over for a short time by the Wantage Sisters and then run by a Board of Governors and a lay

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Johnson*, James Boswell.

headmistress. It was during this final stage that the school rapidly declined and the Governors decided to amalgamate with St Peter's, Mazagon. After some controversy this was authorized by a court order in 1952 which had the effect of restoring the two schools to that close relationship they had in the early days of their life. At the same time a group of outstanding girls came to St Peter's and were looked after by the All Saints Sisters. These strengthened the school in every way. The Khandala Board of Governors also provided a skeleton governing body which later on was able to expand into a governing body for the amalgamated schools. But this last development was still in the future.

At the beginning of 1955 events both in the Society at home and at St Peter's reached a climax. At home, a shortage of novices made it clear that the Society would eventually have to withdraw from one of its mission centres and Bombay was chosen for this purpose. Permission was then given to proceed with the transfer of the school and hostel to a Board of Governors, made by enlarging the existing board for Khandala school, and to appoint a new Principal. The Board of Governors was formed. It included the Bishop of Bombay, together with the Archdeacon of Bombay, the Father Provincial of the Society, the Mother Provincial of All Saints, and two other co-opted members. Court approval was obtained for the transfer which came into effect on 1 June 1955. Then a new Principal, Mr M. Duthie, was appointed and in the following term the school and hostel started another phase of its life under new control.

The selection of Mr M. Duthie as the first Principal under the new management was particularly fortunate. Together with his wife he strengthened and developed the institutions for the next ten years and when he handed over to his successor, Mr C. J. Olliver, it was clear that the transfer had been for the good of this work and the children who in increasing numbers came to benefit from it.

A year later, in 1956, the Society withdrew from Bombay, handing over its Mission House to the school as a Girls' dormitory. At the same time the All Saints Sisters withdrew and Khandala House in their compound became another building available for the rapidly expanding school. In yet another form, an institution swallowed up the body which had created it. Not

only did St Peter's School take over the church: it eventually became heir to the Society as well. The compound which once contained a variety of independent forms of life and service has now passed under the control of St Peter's School, and the smaller forms of life have been absorbed into this one institution. This need be no cause for regret, but it may illustrate what happens when the balance between contemplation and action is upset and be a warning for future planning and control of work undertaken by religious communities.

There was an Indian side to the Society's missionary work in Bombay which in the early days was much more prominent than it became later. A small part of it took place in St Peter's compound. A larger part was undertaken in the compound of the Holy Cross Church, Umerkhadi. There were also a few scattered Indian parishes near Bombay and under such stalwart missionaries as Father Lord and Father Barton missionary tours were made to the villages in the Konkan.

The Indian work in St Peter's compound was limited to a small group of buildings known as St Paul's hostel. These were occupied by a small number of Indian apprentices who were rarely adequately supervised and tended to become undisciplined. As the majority of the population of the compound was Anglo-Indian, there was often tension between the two groups. It became increasingly an unhappy arrangement and eventually most of this hostel was taken over as staff quarters for St Peter's School.

The Umerkhadi compound was on a much larger scale. This work began in a small way with the opening of St. John's hospital on 15 February 1876. Later this hospital became the centre of a remarkable work carried out by Dr Gertrude Bradley. This exceptional woman, having qualified as a doctor, came to Bombay to minister to the sick and also to initiate educational work for poor Indians. In 1893 she opened St John's Night School in the compound where many Indians were educated at the end of their day's work. St Andrew's day school was opened in 1895 and this developed into a high school in 1912. Besides running an extensive practice in Bombay, Dr Bradley for a time opened a convalescent home in Bassein.

From such beginnings the Umerkhadi compound grew into a strong mission centre for Indian Christians. These were first under the care of the Rev. James Henry Lord, not a member of the Society but a close collaborator in many of its works. On 1 December 1898 the church of the Holy Cross was completed. It was designed by Father Kershaw. Father Lord remained in charge of this church until 1903, when he moved to the Konkan and started another form of mission work among a group of people called the Beni Israelites.

The Christian compound of Umerkhadi passed through many vicissitudes. Whenever a Father of the Society was available, he supervised the work of an Indian priest in charge. But unfortunately a new element entered into the compound with the development of this land as a housing centre. Unsatisfactory tenants began to infiltrate and the order and discipline of the compound as a Christian centre was much endangered. St Andrew's school was closed in 1930, and from then onwards all Christian work was confined to the church. The compound population became a mixture of people in sympathy with the church with a minority who were only concerned with the church as a landlord of very unsuitable and decrepit property. When the time came for transfer to the diocese this was the one property that the diocese was unwilling to accept and finally did so with many forebodings.

The work in the Konkan was in its beginnings much concerned with Father Lord and his work among the Jews. For many years he carried on a simple itinerating kind of mission much as the Father Founder envisaged in his original plan. The centre of this work was the small village of Sai, but from 1910 onwards the dispensary at Panvel became increasingly important. When the itinerating work was no longer possible, this dispensary was developed into a hospital and for many years flourished under the care of the All Saints Sisters. When they withdrew in 1956 the hospital came under the care of Father Huntley and with the loyal help of Miss Stella Shute and the Society of St Francis survived and developed into a strong independent evangelistic work. The simplicity and smallness of this hospital may explain why it survived as a missionary enterprise long after other more ambitious work had been transferred. There was another im-

portant point about it: the balance between the chapel and the hospital was carefully kept so that one never outgrew the other. This was a work after St. Francis' own heart.

The Society also helped to form and supervise the work of certain parishes around Bombay. These were at Dadar, Dharavi, and Kurla. For a short time Father Rangaswamy worked at Thana and Father Huntley had a kind of roving commission for Kalyan and Ambarnath. The difference between this and all other work done by the Society in Bombay was that this had no institutional connections and was exclusively pastoral. As a result strong Indian congregations were developed in these places under the immediate leadership of their own Indian priests. Under Father Williams' guidance these congregations were carefully prepared for independence and integration into the diocese. From 1950 onwards the Society no longer appointed the parish priests of these parishes and in 1956 a scheme of diocesanization and endowment was drawn up which made them completely independent. This Indian work has continued with a vigorous life of its own and is perhaps the most enduring missionary work of the Society in Bombay.

On 11 January 1965 I landed on Santa Cruz airport at 5.50 a.m. after a ten-year absence from India. It was a very different arrival from the first, now almost twenty years ago. This time it was in the luxury of a Boeing 707 and there was no leisurely wait from the deck of a ship anchored in the harbour, with the chance to absorb gradually the new surroundings. We swept through an avenue of lights on to the airport and just as the sun was rising were in the centre of the noise and confusion of customs and the beginning of another sweltering day. From then until my return from the same airport on 1 November 1965 there was an ample opportunity to assess the changes in the Society's work in Bombay which had taken place during its first ten years of independence.

The life of the church in Bombay during those eleven months seemed strong. St John's, Colaba, had lost many of its European congregation, but Indians had taken their place. The Cathedral congregation was much the same and there was plenty of life at Byculla and All Saints. St Peter's was now a school chapel, and, although there was a fairly large congregation for the Three

Hours service on Good Friday, at most services the congregation was made up exclusively of children from the school. The numbers were smaller than in the past, but those who came seemed well instructed and there had been attempts to respond to some of the new liturgical changes.

St Peter's School had grown in many ways. The old Mission House was now occupied by girls and the Principal. A new building had been constructed on the Nicholson Hall and in the Sisters' compound the former workshop building had been taken over by the school and converted into up-to-date classrooms. The school was now in the same category as such English medium schools as the Cathedral School and Christ Church, Byculla. There were many signs that in spite of this growth the essential spirit of the school had been preserved. My impression was that the great days of this school in its work for education in India were still in the future.

The development of the Umerkhadi compound had not yet taken place during this visit. All that happened then was its transfer to the diocese. But a year later an unusual Christmas card arrived from the Umerkhadi Cooperative Housing Society Ltd which contained a picture of an elaborate block of flats which was being erected in this compound. Later, this account of the laying of the foundation of these flats was received:

#### UMERKHADI CO-OP SOCIETY FOUNDATION

A portion of earth from Bethlehem and Jerusalem and a little water from the river Jordan went into the foundation of the building of the Umerkhadi Co-operative Housing Society in Bombay on Sunday.

The Right Revd C. J. G. Robinson, Bishop of Bombay, performed the foundation ceremony. The building being constructed at the Holy Cross church compound at Umerkhadi will have 16 upper floors when completed and will be one of the tallest buildings of the east side of the city.

Mr S. Fredilis, president of the Association, welcomed the Bishop. Packets of the earth and the pot of water were presented to the Society by Mr and Mrs Paltanwala.

So a new form of activity opens up in the Holy Cross Compound and it may well be that this will lead to the full growth of

life which was hoped for when the Fathers started their work here.

Many thoughts passed through my mind as the homeward bound V.C.10 flew over Bombay on its way to England. How differently many things had turned out compared with the original plans. How many old ideas had been discarded in the light of disappointments and deepened experience.

## 5

### *Poona*

Poona in many ways is the opposite of Bombay. It is no gateway, but rather an oasis in the vast plain known as the Deccan. Bombay is a great cosmopolitan city. Poona is a Hindu religious stronghold, the centre of a wonderful Marathi culture. For most of the year Bombay swelters in heat and noise. Poona, for most of the year, provides the climate and amenities of a hill station and is surrounded by some of the loveliest country in India. No wonder that when Bombay became unendurable the Governor and his staff in British days should have retreated to a magnificent estate at Ganeshkind, some five miles from Poona, to recuperate.

The differences between the two cities were reflected in the differences between the mission work of the Society in them. In Bombay the form of mission was mainly traditional and institutional. It was a transcript of what the Society had attempted in Cowley, and what the church was doing in parishes all over England. But in Poona the work was of a wider kind, concerned not merely with the foundation and extension of the Church but with the advancement of the kingdom. True, the Fathers preached the gospel in Poona through the medium of churches and schools, but they went much further. In Poona they advanced the kingdom through such instruments as technical schools, industrial workshops, a fruit farm; and they even at one stage went so far as to introduce compost to their market garden at a time when it was under suspicion at home and quite unknown in India. And some Fathers in Poona, following the example of Teilhard de Chardin,

thought it no neglect of their missionary vocation to study professionally the wonderful natural life around Poona.

Within this more varied pattern, however, there was an organization which resembled what was being used in Bombay. In Poona, the work was a partnership between the Fathers and the Sisters. Here it was the Community of St Mary the Virgin who provided the Sisters. There were groups of institutions and beyond them this bold series of experiments in advancing the kingdom of Christ.

Unlike the work in Bombay, the work in Poona was started by others. It began in 1831 with the work of a Scots presbyterian who started missionary work at Panch Howd. This was a native part of Poona on the outskirts of the city near the cantonment. A Tamil priest from Bombay took over the work in 1868 and in the next year the mission took on an official status when Bishop Douglas of Bombay took over responsibility and sent two S.P.G. missionaries to run it. It was two years later when Father Rivington preached a mission in Poona and with Father Goreh started to work there. This began the connection between the Society and Poona.

Meanwhile the C.M.S. joined in. In 1968 this Society opened a divinity school in Poona. This school is still running and throughout its long life there has been close contact between those responsible for it and the Fathers of the Society.

It was Bishop Mylne who laid the foundation of a permanent mission centre at Panch Howd by purchasing a bungalow there which became the first Mission House of the Society. Mission buildings have since sprung up around this centre, but it still remains the obvious growing point from which everything else started. The first priest to occupy this bungalow was Benjamin Bulley, the Bishop's chaplain. Later he was joined by Cecil Stansfield Rivington and Mr C. King. The Fathers did not take over full responsibility until 1882.

At the time when Bishop Mylne established a mission in Poona, he asked the Sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin to help. They responded in 1877 by sending six Sisters to Poona. So it was the Sisters who first settled in the city, with the Fathers

arriving some years later. This situation has now been reproduced, the Sisters remaining in Poona and the Fathers returning to England in 1967.

From very small beginnings at Wanowri the work of the Sisters has grown over the years until it now includes a variety of institutional activities. The most important of these institutions as they now exist and the approximate dates when they were founded are as follows:

- 1877 St Mary's School
- 1887 St Michael's and St Katherine's hostels
- 1889 The Epiphany Boarding House
- 1899 St Gabriel's Hostel
- 1905 St Hilda's Primary School
- 1901 St John's Hospital
- Holy Family Home
- St Crispin's Home, Yerandawana

All these institutions represent an imposing complex of good works. More than 2000 children are cared for in them, the majority of them Christians, but at St Mary's School there are many non-Christians from influential homes. The value of such work depends upon the motive with which it is done. It could be mere philanthropy—and the result could be no more than pauperization on a large scale. Anyone merely reading missionary reports could suspect this to be the case, but anyone who has lived among these institutions and known the children trained in them would know that this is not true. Much nearer the truth is the motive which Morris West describes as inspiring the Russian Pope, Kiril, in his novel *The Shoes of the Fisherman*. He puts it in this way:

You ask me where I want to lead you, where I want to lead the church. I will show you. I want to lead you back to God, through men. Understand this, understand it in mind and heart and obedient will. We are what we are, for the service of God through the service of man. If we lose contact with man—suffering, sinful, lost, confused men crying in the night, women agonizing, children weeping—then we too are lost because we shall be negligent shepherds who have done everything but the one thing necessary.

Back to God through men: this is the motive behind the work of



the Sisters in Poona. They are not merely engaged in good works for some of the most needy of God's children; this activity is part of a bigger adventure, the adventure of a pilgrimage to God.

Back to God. There is no doubt that this is the primary purpose behind all the work of this Community. It is proclaimed in every stone and activity of St Mary's Convent, standing in the most noisy and restless part of Panch Howd. The garden, alive and well-watered speaks the presence and peace of God. The Convent buildings are a fortress of silence. The wooden steps leading to the chapel speak of the ascent to God through the Office and Eucharist and Mental Prayer. It is a lighthouse, a generating station of power, a road leading back to God.

This convent building was dedicated by the Bishop on the Feast of the Visitation in 1889 and has since been occupied by the Community as the centre of its life. It is one of the key positions of the Christian life in India.

But always back to God through men. Tens of thousands have received ministry through the hands of this small community of women. Never has this ministry been allowed by them to become an end in itself. It has always been used as a means of return to God through men, both for themselves and those to whom they have ministered. Of this one has so often been reminded when in the middle of some ministry the chapel bell has sounded and been obeyed, either by a gesture of recollection or, if this has not been possible, by putting aside the ministry to respond to God in prayer.

It is only against this motive of back to God through men that the highly organized activity of the Sisters of St Mary the Virgin in India can be understood and justified.

The work of the Sisters is of three kinds: educational, medical, and industrial. Each needs to be described separately and in relation to the particular institutions concerned.

The educational work of the Sisters in Poona is of many kinds and begins with the small children at the Holy Family Home. From them it passes on to the older children at St Gabriel's Hostel and is most completely expressed in the complex welfare organization at Yerandawana. A great deal of it is educational. This is centred at St Mary's School in the cantonment where an

English education is given to both Anglo-Indian children and many from other communities. Then there are the educational activities within the compound of the Convent at Panch Howd, the girls cared for in the various hostels and the large Primary school of St Hilda's. Here many cultures are welded together in one family. And then there is a wide range of religious education as well.

John Taylor in his fascinating book, *The Primal Vision*, quotes the African proverb, "When the leopard comes to you, the club of your neighbours won't drive him off", and then makes this comment:

That devastating Ganda proverb should, perhaps, be enough to check any more non-Africans from offering to interpret Africa to the world. Fortunately a growing number of Africans are taking on the task and I can be at best a bagman retailing their products. Even that I would not attempt to be were it not for a sense of urgency in the search for the true meeting-place where Christ is conversing with the soul of Africa. And I take courage from the conviction that one necessary qualification for the stranger who wishes to speak is to know how little he has understood. That, at least, I have learnt in many bitter lessons.<sup>1</sup>

All this is equally true of India. Christ is undoubtedly conversing with the soul of India and there is a sense of urgency in the need to find this meeting place. It could be in the schools and universities of India, but these wait for Indians themselves to discover and make it known. The Sisters' description of their work at St Mary's and in their other Poona schools shows an awareness of this vital need and a humility which recognizes that the search is still on and the discovery yet to be made. Even though few Christians can share a part of the search in India, all can share this search through prayer.

This is how they write of one of their great educational works, St Mary's school, Poona, but much of this description applies to them all.

St Mary's School in the camp is not strictly part of the mission, but it must be mentioned as it is a work done amongst the most influential Indians. It is an English-medium school, from the nursery to the Indian School Certificate classes, and the children come from the well-

<sup>1</sup> *The Primal Vision*, John V. Taylor (S.C.M.), 1963, p. 15.

to-do and often cultured families. Hindus and Parsees are in the majority, although the teaching staff is mostly Christian. They are happy, intelligent children, and St Mary's is strikingly similar to our C.S.M.V. schools in England. We cannot doubt that here the Holy Spirit is at work, and we may hope that these responsive and lively young people are learning something more than how to pass examinations. We may hope indeed that God is in fact preparing the way, through an acceptance of ideals of loving service, for the recognition of Christ as Lord when his time comes to reveal himself to the people of India.

One cannot help thinking that, as the meeting place between Christ and his Indian children is more clearly known, St Mary's, Poona and many other English-medium Schools like it will become more and more strikingly dissimilar to any C.S.M.V. schools in England and will take on a pattern all their own. So when girls in a retreat conducted by a Cowley Father in 1965 wrote afterwards that "they intended to do their best to remember the importance of all the addresses and instructions for hundreds and hundreds of years", he could not but hope that they would soon be forgotten and the girls themselves be engaged in translating his best thoughts into their own idiom and adding many more of their own.

All this applies equally to the other educational institutions of the Community: to St Michael's Hostel and St Katherine's Hostel, which cares for about 100 Christian girls of primary school age; to St Gabriel's Hostel, with its 50 boys and girls between 7 and 11 years old; St Hilda's Primary School, with more than 700 children; and the Holy Family Home, with children of all creeds and castes, mostly foundlings or children with no family to look after them. It has been a question in the past of an abundant sowing. Now it will increasingly take the form of growth, a growth which will be in the direction of an increasing independence. There are already many signs that this form of growth is taking place. The staffs of these institutions are already almost entirely Indian and St Hilda's School has an Indian headmistress who was herself once a pupil of the school. The day is almost in sight when this considerable educational work will pass into the hands of the people for whom it was planned.

The medical work of the Sisters has passed through many phases. It began in 1888, when the Community took over the

management of the largest hospital in Poona, the Sassoon hospital. For many years they worked there, under difficulties both from the staff and the patients. In those early days nursing was regarded as unsuitable for women of any community, and the Sisters had to recruit and train a staff in the face of much opposition. They had also to win the confidence of their patients, often very suspicious of everything that went on in hospital. By the time this hospital was handed back to the Government in 1919 it had been raised to a high standard of efficiency which it still maintains.

As far back as 1881 the Rev. J. D. Lord had a small hospital in a hired house at Panch Howd. This continued until he moved to Ahmednagar in 1887. In 1890, with the help of a grant from the S.P.C.K. a dispensary was built near the church. This came into use when Dr Mary Crawley took over in 1895, and when she left it was passed over to the Sisters, who since 1901 have been responsible for this work. It has since been enlarged and has now grown into a much-valued dispensary and maternity hospital which the Sisters describe as "small and homely and much beloved by Panch Howd families". They go on to say: "How many of the present mothers and fathers were born within its walls. Here they find a loving concern for themselves and their families. And how many homeless waifs have been given a happy start in the children's ward." St John's Hospital is one of the oldest and most effective of all the medical works of the Community and when the Poona municipality recently erected a hospital of their own nearby they were clearly influenced by the pattern of the Sisters' hospital both in the form of the building and also in the way it is being run.

St Crispin's Home, Yerandawana, is a later growth which combines both medical and welfare work. It grew out of an earlier foundation of Father Elwin, designed for destitute boys. Here the Sisters apply their great experience in meeting the needs of unmarried mothers, broken homes, and destitute children. It is a work which tries to heal emotional illnesses and through well-organized workshops and a school provides a wide range of therapeutic treatment. When the Khadakvasla dam burst in 1962, the water from the lake surrounded the buildings but was held back by a strong containing wall. This event was a kind of

image of what St Crispin's does for many Indian people. It gives them a temporary protection from the waves of this world, but it also aims at making them sufficiently strong to pass out again into the world and to take their part in renewing the broken fabric of their lives.

The industrial work of the Sisters has never been on a large scale, but it has been based on principles which are now being widely accepted and developed. Within the Convent grounds they run a needlework school and a church bakery. The work done in the school is of a very high quality and it is done under Christian conditions which provide opportunities to combine work with prayer. This principle of prayer and work is vital in the manifestation of the kingdom of Christ to the world and illustrates an important feature of the teaching of F. D. Maurice who wrote:

The humblest may dwell on the thought that they ought to be like Christ, till they forget that he is the head of the body, that each man is only a member of his body, and that the highest perfection we can have is simply to do exactly what he has sent us to do, to be exactly what he is working in us to be. . . . When we try to claim a purity of our own we become impure.<sup>1</sup>

A generation often brought up too uncritically on *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis may well learn from the industrial work going on in the compound of the Convent at Panch Howd the wider boundaries of Christ's kingdom and grow to a more balanced view of what is involved in aspiring to Christian perfection.

Father Elwin, in his book *Indian Jottings*, sums up his own impressions of Poona and at the same time speaks for many of the Fathers who shared missionary work with them in that city. He writes: "The Indian missionary, even from the first moment of his arrival at the station, finds that he has everything to learn, and that he has to start life again from the beginning."<sup>2</sup> What absorbing things there were to learn and what adventures developed from that beginning form the happy memories of a great number of the Fathers who once lived and worked in Panch Howd.

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith of the Liturgy and the Doctrine of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1860). F. D. Maurice 44. Quoted by W. Merlin Davies in *An Introduction to F. D. Maurice's Theology* (S.P.C.K.), (1964), pp. 187-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Jottings*, Fr. E. F. Elwin, Mowbrays, p. 2.

The Society accepted responsibility for this mission in June 1882, but because of shortage of numbers it was some time before an adequate staff could be sent. Among those who came to Poona in those early days were Father Page and Brother Beale. Father Benson spent some time there during 1890 after his resignation as Superior General of the Society.

Until 1891 Father C. S. Rivington was nominally in charge of the Society's work in Poona. In that year he resigned and withdrew to Karla where he built up a centre for training Indians for the ministry of the Indian church. This work he planned on the simplest principles and before he left Karla for Betgeri-Gadag in the Ahmednagar district he had produced a generation of Indian priests of outstanding calibre who served the church in the Bombay diocese with faithful and efficient devotion. Ambrose Surve, one of the last of these great priests, died in 1967. Although never a member of the Society, Father Rivington altogether directed the mission at Panch Howd for fifteen years.

The Rev. W. L. Nanson who had been helping with the Society's work since 1886 accepted the invitation to take over from Father Rivington and continued in charge until 1894, when he withdrew to take up new work at Bishop's College, Calcutta.

The Society was now in a position to send Father Relton as the first Superior at Poona and he was installed on 13 October 1894. He was soon joined by Father Tovey in 1895, Mr Jenner, Mr Hollings, the Rev. S. B. Lotlikar and the Rev. R. Dhawle. Father Relton did not reign for long. He died on 15 February 1897 from injuries caused by a fall of timber in the compound of the Mission workshop.

Father Elwin came out from England in April 1897 and became Provincial Superior. He was joined in December by Father Moore. The Poona mission now attained stability and continued until the withdrawal of Father Bishop and Father Wain in 1967. During this time the work grew until from small beginnings it has assumed the following shape:

The Church of the Holy Name  
St Crispin's Church and mission centre at Yerandawana  
St John's Hostel  
St Edward's School  
St Luke's Hostel

## The Mission Workshop

Outstation work at Rasta Peth, Lonaula, and Kirkee.

This list of activities for the kingdom of Christ naturally divides into two main sections: missionary and educational. But there is a third division, the attempt to advance the kingdom by industrial experiment. This attempt, though always on a small scale, must not be under-estimated, with regard both to its immediate and to its long-term importance. And then as the source of this activity there was the religious life, lived faithfully through all those years, first in the Mission House near the church and later in the more imposing building some two hundred yards further up the street. It is this life that we must consider first.

For almost their first twenty years in Poona the Fathers lived in what later came to be known as the old Mission House. This was the kind of building the Father Founder would have approved, of medium size, two-storied, fitting inconspicuously into the environment of Panch Howd. It was so near the church that the Fathers were able to say their offices in a chapel behind the High Altar. When, in 1913, Father Nicholson built the new Mission House, this old one became a hospital. For Father Williams it always had a special attraction and when a wedding was being celebrated and the noise in the new Mission House was unbearable he used to go back to the old one where he found peace and silence.

The new Mission House, however necessary at the time and however convenient for clergy retreats, was a disaster. To use modern jargon, it projected the wrong image of a religious community. It projected the image once deplored by Father Benson of a house lived in by "agents of a monied Society". Some people thought it resembled the outside of the Natural History museum in Kensington. Others were less polite. It overshadowed all the other buildings in Panch Howd with its three stories, wide verandas and imposing carriage entrance. The rooms were large and high and had the advantage of coolness, but it would have been difficult to design a more complete distortion of the ideal of religious poverty.

And yet, in spite of this grave handicap, the Fathers lived there for more than fifty years and within it generated an authentic

religious spirit. I shall always remember its first impact when I arrived in the late afternoon after a long journey from Nasik in an army lorry in 1946 and finding Father Williams to welcome me in the deep silence and genuine order of this house. It never failed to give these gifts and they were shared not only by many guests but also by a wonderful succession of faithful servants, the most outstanding being the Hindu servant, Bhimaji, who served at least two generations of Fathers and died in that service. He never became a Christian, but he absorbed much of the religious spirit. He was often seen at prayer before sweeping the chapel, and his service of the Fathers was a complete liturgy in itself. A visitor once expressed surprise that a house so far from Oxford could so faithfully reproduce the spirit and atmosphere of the Mother House. He should not have been surprised. Behind the life of both houses was the same discipline and the same rule, and it was this that shaped the religious life lived in Poona and enabled the Fathers to triumph over the great handicap of their physical surroundings.

Over and over again the Father Founder warned against pretentious and unsuitable buildings for the religious life. "Large premises are a serious hindrance to poverty",<sup>1</sup> he wrote. Again, "Buildings are the sepulchre rather than the home of the living church."<sup>2</sup> These warnings were certainly relevant to the situation in Poona and to the Society in other parts of the world, but unfortunately very few Fathers plan and build such buildings whilst many inherit them and have to live in them.

The missionary work of the Society in Poona was centred around the church of the Holy Name. This church was begun before the Fathers came to Poona and came into use at Christmas 1885. Under the Fathers it was enlarged and embellished and brought to its present form in 1906. The church had a lofty bell tower in the churchyard with a peal of eight bells which fortunately could not be rung on account of weaknesses in the tower. One uses the word fortunately advisedly. In the clear, still air of Poona even the tolling of one bell was almost more than the people and dogs of the city could stand. The ringing of the whole peal would have been unendurable!

<sup>1</sup> *Further Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, ed. W. H. Longridge, Mowbrays, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

The church building was basilican in style. Paved inside with grey marble and without chairs, there was a welcome coolness; and the peace of the whole building radiated the presence of God. The altar of coloured marble rested under an imposing canopy. Later, as the congregation grew more sophisticated, chairs were added near the immersion font, but the Fathers succeeded in keeping the main part of the building empty and there the large congregation, mostly of boys and girls, sat cross-legged in Indian fashion to worship.

From the earliest times Father Elwin longed to use Indian music in this church and to introduce Indian lyrics in the place of Hymns Ancient and Modern, with their inadequate music and translations. His desire was shared by many others, but to this there was always strong opposition from Indian Christians who thought that such music was too strongly reminiscent of the Hinduism they had rejected. However, some steps in this direction were taken. Sister May wrote a form of Mass music based on Indian forms which became popular. The Fathers made a collection of some Indian lyrics and published them as a supplement to the hymn book. Although a harmonium found its way into the church, no organ did; and the harmonium was somewhat muted by the addition of a violin, clarinet, and saxophone, whilst in the days of Father Wilkins on Palm Sunday trumpets rang through the church and drowned even the singing. Much in this direction still waits to be done, including a radical revision of the liturgy on genuine Indian lines, but one can be grateful that so much was done in the Holy Name church to teach Indians to worship God through the use of their own valuable art forms.

Preaching in this church was always an exhilarating experience, whether through a confident and embellishing interpreter or with a halting and imperfect Marathi of one's own. The children especially gave an intense and forgiving attention. They were not yet satiated with newspaper headlines and television and wireless. They would listen, expectant for the truth which they had been taught came from the preacher, and how their faces shone with satisfaction when a point was understood and went home. It was after the sermon that the preacher had to be especially careful for then the congregation gathered round to discuss it with him. His Marathi, however indistinct, was praised for its

clarity; the points of the sermon were counted and recalled. There was no need to use modern techniques to stimulate dialogue. It all happened spontaneously and the Word increased and was glorified.

Holy Name church now belongs to the diocese and its parish priest is responsible to the Bishop of Bombay. This is a development the Fathers intended and now welcome. Now they look back with happy memories on those Sundays of exuberant worship in that church and hope that one day they may be allowed to share in it again.

Father Elwin once remarked: "The growth of the church community at Panch Howd rather hinders the church from being a mission to the heathen in the sense that it once was." No doubt he had good reason for saying this at the time, but looked at from a longer perspective one can see that it served the purpose of a missionary centre in many ways.

It was a centre of worship. Just as St Thomas' cathedral in Bombay set the standard of worship for English-speaking churches so the Holy Name church set the standard for the Marathi-speaking churches of the diocese. Here non-Christians on festivals such as Christmas and the feast of the Holy Name were able to see the outward glory of Christian worship, a glory that matched and often exceeded the exuberance of their own festivals. Here preaching of a fairly high order was often to be heard. And when the Indian priests of the diocese came to Panch Howd from their small and thinly populated churches they were heartened by the strength and numbers of the congregation of the church of the Holy Name.

This church was also a centre of mission and provided the energy for maintaining outstation work at Yerandawana, Rastas Peth, Kirkee, and Lonaula.

At Yerandawana this work was centred on a Comper-designed church dedicated to St Crispin. This was built in the time of Father Elwin, together with some adjoining buildings which formed a Mission House for the Fathers and a boys' hostel. These were much enlarged when the Sisters took over the whole compound for their new form of welfare work. Now, under the leadership of Sister Hannah, the institution has become one of the biggest welfare activities in Poona. It is also an ecumenical work

where the Roman Catholic Church ministers in the same church to some of the inmates of the Home.

The church at Rastas Peth was built in September 1915. It was designed on much simpler and more suitable lines than St Crispin's and has been served by a succession of good Indian priests. Within walking distance of the Mission House at Panch Howd, it was often served by one of the Fathers and its parish priest was a frequent visitor in the days of Father Williams to discuss his problems.

St Mary's Church in the Kirkee bazaar was dedicated on 25 March 1922. It occupies part of a large compound which is shared with a primary school. When efforts were made in 1965 to close this school they were resisted and the school continued. Sumant Gadkar, a blind priest, was for many years in charge of this church and under his able leadership the Christian community won the respect of many of the non-Christians of Kirkee.

Finally, there was All Saints' Church at Lonaula. This was built to serve the Anglo-Indian community working at the railway junction. For many years one of the Fathers provided services for a dwindling Anglo-Indian congregation. When the need for Marathi services grew, these were also supplied. It was never a very satisfactory arrangement since the town was some forty miles from Poona and needed a resident priest. At the most, one visit a week was usually all that was possible. Yet what a welcome this little congregation always gave and Mr James Connell at Victoria Cottage entertained the visiting Father with what Dr Johnson would have called such "splendour" that every visit was a first class feast.

This work at Yerandawana, Rastas Peth, Kirkee, and Lonaula was primarily pastoral and supervisory, but in the earlier days of the mission at Panch Howd preaching was done regularly in the streets of the city and there was systematic visiting. Besides this, there was also a preaching expedition on Mondays to one of the villages. The value of this kind of work is still much debated and in later years it was abandoned, but those who think of the Edwardian form of the religious life merely in terms of complicated ceremonial and musical imitations of Solesme should read again the accounts of these Monday missionary forays into the villages; with the lunch basket not forgotten, the bridge four during the

heat of the day, the preaching, talking, and lantern slides in the evening, and most of all the courteous welcome of the villagers. This was all before the days of social service and statistics. There were no records of conversions. These people sowed with tears sometimes and often with laughter, and I like to think that years afterwards I reaped a little of the increase.

It happened in this way: During a retreat day at Nanded I was walking through a small village. The path took me past the village school and as I walked past the open door the teacher ran out and invited me in. He then displayed his class before me. Some read, some showed me their writing. They all sang. While I was listening with admiration, the teacher caused tea to be brought and one banana. So I was entertained and refreshed by a man whose name I did not know, by children whose religion was not my own, in a village I had never seen before. Yet there was an immediate friendship and we found ourselves in one kingdom of love. I could not help thinking, as they waved good-bye, that perhaps the great grandfathers of these children might once have welcomed a mission expedition of the Fathers on a particular Monday and whilst resolved not to accept the religion offered to them welcomed the courtesy of those who brought it. It could have been that on this particular day long afterwards these children and their teacher were continuing the giving of thanks for that past visit. "Nothing is done in vain by the Church" was the teaching of St Thomas. Here was yet another illustration of this truth.

The educational work of the Fathers developed in close harmony with the corresponding work of the Sisters. It had to. The Fathers could not allow the future husbands of the girls educated by the Sisters to fall short of those who would one day be their wives. So every school and hostel of the Sisters had to have their masculine counterparts under the control of the Fathers. The most important of these institutions were St John's Hostel, St Edward's School, and St John's School, Kirkee. There were also the mixed institutions called the Holy Family Home and St Gabriel's Home and a home for boys at Yerandawana called St Pancras which was eventually closed. For some years there was a small hostel for High School boys called St Martin's which was in the Fathers' garden and one in the workshop compound for appren-



tices known as St Luke's. Of all these institutions, the most outstanding were St John's Hostel and St Edward's School.

Father Elwin gives this description of the beginning of St Edward's School.

It was found necessary to have a school near at hand for the younger boys, and so a little mission day school began in a house which, though little better than a cottage, was large enough for the needs of the day. As time went on and the Mission grew, this school became much overcrowded, and other supplementary buildings had to be utilized, not always very well suited to their purpose; and the supervision of classes so scattered was difficult. But in 1899 a new day school, dedicated to St Edward, the boy king and martyr, was built with the proceeds of a legacy.<sup>1</sup>

St Edward's School never recovered from this rather haphazard beginning. It continued to grow and one of the last works of the Fathers before leaving India was to add yet another storey to an already over-crowded building. But even more difficult was the almost total lack of an adequate playground and the fact that the buildings were divided into two by a much-frequented public alleyway.

Yet in spite of these architectural drawbacks and under the able leadership of such headmasters as Mr Jadhav and Mr Awaghade, this school achieved an efficient independence. The Fathers were mostly concerned with settling staff frictions, paying salaries, and negotiating with the local education authorities. Meanwhile the head-master and his staff valiantly improvised their way through shortages and difficulties and educated a large and mixed population of Panch Howd children. Many were Hindus, but they were happily integrated with their Christian brothers. The school continues to grow and with full independence plans to expand still further.

St John's Hostel, after several experiments, settled down into a hostel for boys attending St Edward's School and for others attending other schools in Poona. It was closely supervised by one of the Fathers, and under the long and faithful mastership of Mr Daniels reached an outstanding efficiency. The hostel was so intimately related to Mr Daniels and his family that an account of his life forms the best background for describing its growth.

<sup>1</sup> *Thirty-Four Years in Poona City*, Fr. E. F. Elwin, Mowbrays, 1911, p. 88.

When I was last in India, Mr Daniels died. He had already been in retirement for some years, but he continued his daily routine which had marked his years as the hostel master. After another such day of light work, reading the *Times of India* and a short walk, he went to bed at the usual time. He woke up as usual next morning, but instead of beginning another day like all the others he had a short spasm of pain and then died. I found him a short time afterwards in the peace of death, surrounded by his family, his work done; and we could only thank God for a life so wonderfully fulfilled.

Mr Daniels gave his working life to St John's Hostel where he served generations of boys as a kind of Indian version of Mr Chips without mercifully any of the aggravating immaturities of his English counterpart. He built the hostel around the firm centre of his own home, a wonderful Christian home with Mrs Daniels taking the part of mother not only to her own large family but to all the boys of the hostel as well. What a family it was: her own and generations of boys from all over India.

Mr Daniels generously gave all the Fathers, especially the Father in charge of the hostel, a full share in his home. Almost all of his sons could play some instrument or other, and in my days, after supper on Sundays, something like an orchestra came into being, while the hostel boys sat in the shadows and listened and imagined a future when they too would have such a family and make such music for themselves.

The time when the Father in charge most nearly reigned over the hostel was during the hot weather camps. For some reason or other, Mr Daniels never considered these camps part of his responsibility. He would prepare for them. He would even permit some of his staff to go on them. But only once do I remember him going himself, and even then, after a few days and without giving any reason, he suddenly returned to Panch Howd and resumed his home routine as if the camp had never existed. It was embarrassing and many plans had to be changed, but Mr Daniels seemed quite oblivious to anything but his own need for a holiday. Looking back on this experience, I think he was right, but it was the one time when I remember feeling he had let me down.

The normal site for these camps was the late Canon Rivington's ordination school buildings at Karla. These had been built on a

former military staging post, some forty miles from Poona. It was a high piece of ground with a clump of mango trees, providing welcome shade, a river within walking distance for swimming, and a well nearby. The buildings were a few sheds, a small chapel, and one room for the Father in charge.

This camp was a centre for walks to the Karla caves, the Shirotah and Walwant lakes, Lohogad fort, Lonaula and Khandala school. Usually the fruit season was on when the camps were held at Karla and so there was an abundance of fruit. After day-long walks we used to return to cool and peaceful evenings when, after the meal, hurricane lamps were lit and the boys followed their imaginations into drama and songs until sleep came to prepare them for another day of freedom more wonderful than the last.

Karla was one of these camp sites, but there were others. There was Nanded where Mr Daniels' defection took place and Gerald Lester, a friend of Army days, took over, without knowing a word of Marathi or the ways of Panch Howd boys and organized one of the most successful of all our camps. There was Kirkee, where we lived for ten days in the church compound and watched an Indian priest at work, showing how a man who loved God could lead and win his people. And there were the places for day picnics, the Empress gardens near Poona, and the Botanical gardens outside of Kirkee.

Wonderful times of freedom they were, but what a relief it was at the end of them to find Mr Daniels waiting to take over again and re-discipline his boys for the next term's work. And what a relief it was to return to the silence and order of the religious life in the Mission House.

A few years before he died, Mr Daniels retired. He went to live in St Luke's compound where he continued to live by his old routine with his wife and two children. His family was now mostly married and another ruled in his place over the hostel. But the traditions formed by him survived and there is every hope that this major educational work of the Society in Poona will continue.

And now there is the industrial experiments of the Fathers in Poona to consider, but before doing so these words of Dr John Taylor are worth pondering. He is writing with Africa in his mind, but what he writes applies to India as well.

Like soldiers scaling a wall, we climb upon one another's shoulders

and hoist each other up into the city of God. But if this is the manner in which Christ is drawing all men unto himself, if this is the process by which all things in the heavens and on earth are being summed up in him, then we dare not draw a line around the Church and cut it off from the whole totality. The Church's relation to the world is one of excruciating tension but not separation.<sup>1</sup>

The Fathers who attempted to train boys in carpentry and weaving in the Epsom workshop, those who bought and cultivated a small fruit farm at Nanded, Father Bishop who introduced compost to a derelict piece of ground and transformed it into a market garden: these too shared this vision of the Church and the world, of a leaven working within and changing into itself the lump.

The first attempt at industrial training was made in October 1881, when a carpenter's shop was started with seven apprentices. It began with great hopes. Indeed, one of the Fathers wrote: "The work is still in its infancy, but that which has been done already gives us ground to hope that it will go on developing and ultimately be a source of profit to the Mission." It went on for a very long time, but it never became a source of profit. On the other hand, it became an instrument for training hundreds of Poona boys to earn their living. In March 1901 this small carpenter's shop grew into the Epsom Workshop. It was moved later into St Luke's Compound, where it developed a weaving section which was very much inspired by Father Playne. For several years a Technical School was run side by side with the work-shop and many boys were trained there for the Government Certificate of Carpentry from St Edward's School. This was one of the most far-seeing of all the educational works planned by the Fathers and although they had to overcome some reluctance and much misunderstanding when they included this in the curriculum of the school they have now been proved right by present-day educational standards. Their plan was in effect a form of comprehensive education many years in advance of their times. It was built on the sound principle of combining an academic and manual training within one educational establishment. Unfortunately as the demands on the academic side increased and carpentry instructors became harder to find, the Technical School had to be abandoned, but one hopes that it will soon be revived.

<sup>1</sup> *The Primal Vision*, John V. Taylor (S.C.M.), p. 131.

It was sound education as well as sound theology and shows how balanced was the Fathers' attitude towards both the Church and the Kingdom.

One continuing result of this industrial venture was the formation by past pupils of a small coffin-making company with its headquarters in St Luke's Compound. Here good coffins are still made at reasonable prices, a much needed commodity for Christian funerals. This is an unexpected development of the industrial school. Little could the Fathers who founded it have anticipated that their institution would one day make coffins for their funerals. Yet for many of them this was the case.

Another not so successful form of industry was attempted. The Fathers tried to form a school for Christian *dhobis*, or what we should call a laundry. Here they found themselves in collision with the caste system. *Dhobis* are a very strong group of people and they work on the principle of the "closed shop". They opposed this attempt to invade their monopoly and when the Fathers realized their resentment they wisely withdrew. Most of the Fathers at the time must have written this off as a complete failure, but I have good reason for thinking differently.

It was in the summer of 1965. In sending my clothes to the *dhobi* I carelessly left fifty rupees in one of my pockets. The *dhobi* treated my clothes according to custom, that is he bashed them on a rock and took away much of their life in restoring them to whiteness. It was when he was ironing this habit that he discovered the sodden remains of the fifty rupees. They had suffered like the habit from his treatment, but they were still usable. He could have taken them for himself and no one would have been wiser, but that evening he came to the Mission House with the rupees and gave them back to me. This action represents honesty of the highest standard anywhere on this side of heaven and as I gave him five rupees as his reward I could not help thinking that this man was expressing the gratitude of his caste to the Fathers for their courteous withdrawal all those years ago from competition with one of the most closely-knit trades unions in the world.

Teaching boys to play ex-army instruments could not strictly be called an industrial training, and yet through it many boys got employment in the Army. This was the work of Father Wilkins who with infinite patience persuaded music out of boys and

instruments which would have defeated the efforts of anyone else.

And then there was the training to play games by English rules, perhaps the most lasting gift of the English occupation of India. There is no doubt that through these games more was done for the character training of Indian boys than by any of the other activities of the mission. This is one of the influences which goes on. Cricket is played all over India, in the streets, on vacant plots of ground, on magnificent fields like the Brabourne stadium. And it is played by poor and rich alike. Father Elwin in his book *India and the Indians* has a chapter on games in India and in it he writes of the variety of these games and the way cricket has grown most popular of all. This has had its drawbacks. There was for a short time a plan for building a simple Mission House on the vacant maidan outside of St Mary's church, Poona, but one glance was enough to make the Fathers decide against it. When they went there to inspect the land they found it had already been taken over as a cricket field by the local boys and they knew that nothing less than an invasion on a large scale would have been sufficient to gain possession. So the maidan was left as a cricket field and the Fathers spent their remaining days in the Panch Howd Mission House.

I returned to Poona in 1965, after an absence of ten years, in the same way as I had returned to Bombay. My impressions were somewhat different.

Poona, being more essentially Indian than Bombay, had changed less. At the station there was more noise. The hand-drawn rickshaws had been replaced by Lambrettas, skilfully adapted for this purpose. The great drawback was the noise. There was also much more danger since they were faster and more easily manoeuvrable than the old type. But the animals were unimpressed. The cows still dominated the streets, the goats still fought outside the station, and the dogs barked louder to make themselves heard. New buildings gleamed everywhere, some of them much taller than the large houses of former times, and there were ugly blocks of flats.

The Mission House and the Convent had not lost their calm. In the Convent, under the rule of Mother Doreen, the life outwardly seemed much the same, the offices were said with meticu-

lous regularity, and there was no sign of haste or noise; and the many activities within the Convent garden, including the addition of new classrooms to St Hildas, went on.

The church of the Holy Name had been repainted and looked very clean and used. There was another Indian parish priest and now others were being trained for the priesthood by Father Rangaswamy. These were older men, nearing retirement, who wanted to give the closing years of their life to this work.

At the Mission House there were signs of the coming evacuation. Bhimaji had been replaced by Bhissey and his family. St Martin's had become the home of a large family of Gadkars, St Luke's hostel was smaller and ripe for closure. Under another master St John's Hostel was smaller and yet full of life. St Edward's School under Mr Awaghade and his Indian staff, with its enlarged accommodation, was bigger and stronger than ever. Everywhere there was the feeling that another chapter of life was about to begin and that the Fathers had wisely prepared for these new days of transfer and independence.

The same impression was given in the other parts of the Mission. At Yerandawana the growth under Sister Hannah had changed the compound out of all recognition. What had been a small community had become almost a village. Nanded as the fruit farm of old days was now a research centre, taken over by the Government, with one of the tall, gleaming new buildings where the limes had once grown. There were no signs of the industrial undertakings of the past, except for the recently made coffins in St Luke's Compound waiting to serve the next customers. Kirkee under a new parish priest was beginning to grow more independent and had decided to plan its own future in opposition to what had been planned by the diocese. Everywhere there was change, but nowhere dissolution and death. Of course, one could not help feeling grieved at the loss of old, loved landmarks and activities, but everywhere there was cause to welcome the signs of new growth and development. Like the new India, the Mission work at Panch Howd showed everywhere the ability to take over and manage itself.

The dream of the Father Founder was being realized: the Fathers and the Sisters had sown: others were now reaping. This was as it should be and for it one could be nothing but glad.

## 6

# *Missionary Journeys*

In his original plan for missionary work in India, Father Founder envisaged the possibility of pairs of Fathers going out on missionary journeys into the country. This form of missionary work was never so well developed as the institutional forms in Bombay and Poona; but Father O'Neill was one of its pioneers, and many of the Fathers had some experiences of this kind of work to lighten the burden of their administrative labours.

Father O'Neill was one of the founder members of the Society. Born in 1837, ordained priest in 1864, he joined Father Benson in Oxford in 1865, after serving as a mathematics master at Eton and curacies with Carter of Clewer and Butler of Wantage. He was professed with Father Benson and Father Grafton on the feast of St John the Evangelist in 1866. Then, after some missionary work in England and a visit with Father Benson to America and Canada, he sailed in 1874 to India to fulfil a lifelong ambition to give himself to work in that country. How deep this longing was comes out in a letter he wrote a short time before his death.

God has shown me what an idol I have worshipped, viz., mission work in India. This was the dream of boyhood, the hope of afterlife, my object in seeking the Religious Life and, when the Father Superior sanctioned it, my great interest. When it was settled for me to come here, and still more since I have been in India, it has grown to be a passion.

God of his mercy broke this idol by showing me that He could take

me back to England. How great was the pain. How great the joy. For this only is freedom—to be entirely detached. Now I can really seek for souls because I have (I hope) given up seeking for self. Now I understand what the Father meant by my self-will. His censure and the grace of God have opened my eyes.<sup>1</sup>

He fulfilled his ambition by spending the rest of his life in India, dying there on 28 August 1882.

The first part of Father O'Neill's work in India was exploratory and experimental. He was sent to Patna by Bishop Milman and from that centre attempted evangelistic journeys to various parts of India. But he soon realized that his most powerful witness in India would be given, not through journeys and sermons, but by translation work and a life of service lived out in one place. To achieve this end he moved to a small house in Indore and there remained until his death some years later.

It was in Indore that Father O'Neill made his great personal witness. Much of his time there he lived on his own, sometimes sharing his work with Father Goreh or a visiting member of his community. He lived in extreme poverty and made himself always available. The time not spent in prayer and evangelism was given to the work of translating the psalter into Urdu. Before his death, he had made many contacts, not only with Indians but also with European soldiers in the cantonment.

All through his ministry in India Father O'Neill maintained through letters an intimate contact with Father Benson. How closely they were united appears in the volume of letters which were found and published after his death under the title of *Further Letters of Father Benson*. In these letters is unfolded a remarkable depth of understanding and sympathy between two men who had to spend many years of their life apart, under conditions neither would have chosen, and yet they were able to unlock their hearts to each other in these letters in a way they never achieved with anyone else. Father Benson tells of his twenty-five lonely years at Cowley and Father O'Neill analyses the depths of his character to the man who was so truly for him a Father in God. It was almost as if from this great distance they were going out two by two on a great missionary journey, not only into the

<sup>1</sup> *Father Benson of Cowley*, M. V. Woodgate, p. 127.

country of India but to the heavenly country and the city not made with hands.

After Father O'Neill died Father Benson visited his house at Indore and wrote of it to Father Page as follows:

When Samuel Gopal showed me the other day the hovel where Father O'Neill lived, and the oratory where he spent hours in prayer, I could not help feeling that it was a more important place in the history of India than many a battlefield marked by cross swords on a map. No life can fail of its full result which is thus really given to God.<sup>1</sup>

And Father O'Neill's life did not fail of its full result. He set a pattern of missionary work in India which was taught by Father Benson in a letter of 5 September 1876 and is increasingly recognized as the most vital way of proclaiming the faith. "I have not much faith in fussy processes of proselytism, but there will be a gentle power of grace working round about us if we are living true to it."<sup>2</sup>

This gentle power of grace continues to have its influence in India and in the Indian Church. Further, his life and work witnessed to a legitimate form of religious life at a time when it was in danger of being over-institutionalized. The story of the missionary work of the Society would lack an essential ingredient if it were deprived of the contribution made by Father O'Neill of Indore.

Other Fathers on a smaller scale had experience of this kind of missionary work.

Father Goreh, though never a full member of the Society, spent much of his life in moving about India and in the work of translation and interpretation of the Christian life to Hindus. Like Father O'Neill he was unable to show many practical results from this work, but it was faithfully done and will one day be rewarded.

Other Fathers did this kind of work for short times in the form of visits to other parts of India for missions and retreats. These were of various kinds, some for a few weeks, and in the case of Father Rangaswamy for longer periods.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Father Benson of Cowley*, M. V. Woodgate, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Father Benson*, p. 46.

In many ways Father Rangaswamy inherited much of the spirit of Father O'Neill. He came to the Society after serving as a U.S.P.G. missionary in Mauritius from 1918 to 1937. He was of Indian origin, the only fully professed Indian member of the Society. He served his novitiate at the Mission House, Oxford and soon after his profession in 1940 was sent back to work with the Society in India.

From 1940 to 1966 he fulfilled his vocation in many ways and in different parts of India. Sometimes he was stationed at the Mission House in Bombay, where he carefully lived according to the rule and impressed his sense of peace and order on the house. Sometimes he was engaged in vigorous missionary work at such outstations as Thana and Kalyan, and in that work he showed a remarkable capacity for building a small but strong congregational life. Sometimes he was away on more distant work, such as that involved in his protracted stay at Nandyal after the formation of the Church of South India where he trained the native ministry required to shepherd the continuing Anglicans of that diocese. And when stationed at the Mission House in Poona he showed the same power to live the religious life intensely in the house and also when sent to engage in fruitful pastoral work as well. Whilst in Poona he returned for some time to Mauritius and he also undertook work at Kirkee and helped in the training of priests both for Poona and in Gujerat.

Father Rangaswamy was physically slight, yet what energy and power there were in his small frame, and with what fire and conviction he preached the truth. For him this truth was contained in the Tractarian version of the faith in which he had been trained and which he found practised in the days of his novitiate at Cowley. He was never able fully to assimilate the simpler version of this faith which came into being after the second World War, but he adjusted himself so far as he could and others could not help being impressed by the transparent fire of his conviction as he proclaimed the categorical elements of the faith once delivered to the saints.

The closing years of his life at the Mother House, from 1966 to 1968, were the most edifying of all. Separated from his own people, feeling intensely the English cold and rain, he steadily pursued his life of prayer and developed a life of intercession for

those from whom he was now physically separated. There was a glowing intensity about those last days, almost a reproduction of those last convictions of Father O'Neill when he said: "Oh, how good it is to suffer, one can never know the depths of suffering. We live and learn."

He died quietly on Saturday, 17 August 1968, having properly received all the sacraments as he would have wished from the hands of his Superior and radiated the joy of the Christian life to the nurses of the Radcliffe Infirmary who ministered to his last needs. As with the work of Father O'Neill, we can be sure that his ministry goes on.

For many other Fathers their work of missionary journeying was less extensive and confined to the annual visits to the Oxford Mission Fathers at Calcutta and Barisal and the Church in Ceylon. Each of them will have his own memories of this part of his work. It is my intention to recall some of my own and complement them with descriptions sent by other Fathers when engaged on this work.

There was a long-standing tradition that in most years a Father of the Society should visit the Oxford Mission Fathers and conduct their annual retreat at Barisal. My opportunity to do this came in January 1949.

The Oxford Mission Fathers have their main mission centre in Calcutta in what was then called Cornwallis Street. They had also mission stations in many other places: in Pakistan there was a large one at Barisal, where there was a mission compound shared with the Sisters of the Epiphany, and at Behala there was a smaller mission station, in those days largely run by Father Douglass. My work was to take me to Cornwallis Street, Barisal, and Behala.

Father Williams sent me off from Poona with no more than one word of advice, and that rather unexpected. It was a warning about the bathing facilities at Barisal. "On no account", he said, "attempt to sit in the bath." This advice went into my unconscious and was not to emerge for several days.

The journey to Calcutta really started from Bombay. The afternoon journey from Poona formed a pleasant and leisurely introduction to the main journey which started from Churchgate



station with all the noise, excitement, and tension with which Indians always love to begin a long journey. These reach a climax during the last hour of waiting, providing a kind of emotional catharsis which prepares the nerves to survive all the frustrations which inevitably accompany a long journey. My senses were in a state of total disorder and I was completely relaxed by the time the train pulled out of the station.

On this occasion I travelled third class. This was the only time, for I discovered on that journey that third class Indian style was not seemly accommodation for a European, unable to squat comfortably for hours on end on railway carriage floors and carry three days' food supply in a handkerchief. Besides these difficulties, for most of the journey there were others. The heat was intense and the engine blew a constant stream of smoke and carbon through the open windows so that when I reached Calcutta, covered with engine smuts, Father Mathieson was unable to recognize me. But it was a worthwhile experience, even though not to be repeated. I proved the wonderful accuracy of Kipling's description of train journeys, as he told of Kim's journey with his lama from Lahore to Umballa in the fire carriage.

Once at Cornwallis Street, I was cleaned and fed and slept until the evening, when I felt quite ready for the next stage of the journey from Calcutta to Barisal.

We started this journey in full strength. There were Father Macbeth, the Superior, Father Douglass, and Bishop Foss Westcott, with Father Mathieson acting as baggage officer and movement control. At one stage Father Douglass leant over the rail of the steamer while Father Mathieson was organizing things below and pointed out how good it was to be old and able with a good conscience to leave these things to a younger Father. Not that he was without cares of his own. He had undertaken the organization of Bishop Foss Westcott for this journey and before the end he found himself fully extended.

The train journey to the point of embarkation was slow and made even slower by a rather futile check at the customs point when we entered Pakistan. This incident was dealt with by the simple expedient of transferring our luggage from one carriage to another so that the customs official was never in the carriage at the same time as our luggage. This he seemed to realize, but

he shared in the game and made no attempt to change the rules. It was dark when we boarded the steamer for the long journey up the Hoogly to Barisal. Father Douglass spoke of the time when he had watched a tiger swim across the river in front of his steamer on one journey and hinted that this could happen again. But it was not to be. We had another kind of adventure. Our steamer grounded for eighteen hours on a sandbank, a much less exciting adventure and much more inconvenient.

It happened half-way through the next morning. It was no Torrey Canyon experience. We did not strike our sandbank at high speed—not more than four knots I should think. Further, we were a small steamer carrying passengers, not oil. Nevertheless, we had our moments as we waited for someone to work out a way of refloating us, and until this happened we had no idea when we should arrive and we ran very short of food. We were saved from starvation by a wise Sister who produced from a capacious handbag enough rice for at least two meals. Without this we should have been in some danger of starvation.

We were at last refloated, with the help of another steamer, and proceeded on our journey, arriving at the landing stage for Barisal in the early hours of a cold morning. We walked up the dusty road to the compound and I was shown to my room with a small bathroom attached. A bath and then sleep were all I could think of at that time. All recollection of Father Williams' warning had disappeared. I undressed and stepped into the earthenware bath and at once it burst into a thousand pices and the water was absorbed by the thirsty earth outside. There was no bath. All that remained was bed and I accepted that gratefully.

The rest of the visit, now under the control of the Fathers, passed off smoothly. The retreat was for ten days, with two addresses each day in the red church, shaded and cool; there were long evening walks through countryside cut up by many small canals; in the compound there was the peace which comes from a wisely controlled order; and the Sisters added to this peace and completion. Barisal and the retreat left unforgettable memories. On my return to Calcutta there was one more: a highly privileged visit to Behala.

This visit to Behala was not only at the special invitation of Father Douglass, but at an unusual time. Normally the Father

received his visitors in the late afternoon. By special concession he arranged to see me in the morning. Father Mathieson took me to Behala and Father Douglass was there to receive me with at least a Governor's welcome.

In those days, he had won an almost fabulous reputation. He is described by his biographer as:

In many ways the typical public school Englishman and he loved the virtues typical of the English race; yet to the Indians he became an Indian to help to win India to the dominion of Christ and devoted all his gifts to that service, casting aside the pleasures natural to his buoyant temperament.<sup>1</sup>

Like that he appeared to me on that morning, as he came out of that wire cage in which he controlled his compound, a member of that great "authentic category of Catholic heroic Sainthood"<sup>2</sup> which included such giants as Father O'Neill of Indore and Father Wainwright of St Peter's, London Docks.

He spent much of every day in that small office, covered with wire mesh in the centre of the compound. Some fifty yards away was the large tank, the place where he swam every day and the scene of many exploits. Further away was the simple church with its cool, red floor and then a collection of simple hostel buildings. On the other side of the road were the Sisters' buildings. All this was but a background for the main figure of Behala, Father Douglass himself.

Meeting him that morning was an experience never to be forgotten. In this man, then approaching his eighty-third birthday, emaciated, unable to speak in more than a whisper, holiness shone. The presence of God in all his glory penetrated through the worn-out flesh of this old man. His whispered greetings were a trumpet call of reassurance that God lives in man and speaks through those who courageously give themselves to him. Less than six months after this visit, he was to say to his Superior, "you've heard, my dear, that I've had my marching orders".<sup>3</sup> He died a month later.

One of his brothers has summed up Behala in the days of Father Douglass as follows: "The word 'numinous' has been used of the setting at Behala; it signifies that many became conscious of

<sup>1</sup> *Father Douglass of Behala*, p. 167.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

the Divine Presence more easily when they were there: 'I am nearer in heaven in this church than anywhere else on earth', said the wife of a Viceroy."<sup>1</sup> On that morning I had my share of this experience. It was the highlight of this Calcutta journey.

It was sixteen years later when I returned. There were many changes. The buildings had become more sophisticated and there was now a large Technical School in one corner of the compound. But the spirit of Father Douglass still brooded over the place. And on the way, when I asked for directions to the mission compound, I was met with a blank look by the Hindu outcaste when I mentioned the mission compound, but when I changed my question and asked for the Father Douglass Mission his face lit up with understanding and he seemed glad to point the way. When Father Douglass died, the man could not have been more than five years old. Being dead, the Father continued to speak, as do all the saints of God whose life and witness he shares.

Another traditional journey shared by many of the Fathers was the annual visit to Ceylon. This was for the purpose of conducting retreats for the Sisters and clergy of the island.

My own visit took place in August 1950. Being by that time in charge of St Peter's and having many responsibilities, I decided to cut the travelling time by making the journey both ways by air. This was before the days of jet planes. My plane was a Dakota of war vintage which had an unpleasant habit of splashing oil on its wings, and seemed to take a long time to gain height when leaving the airport. But in spite of fairly long stops at Madras and Trichinopoly the travelling time to Colombo was cut down to about eleven hours, a saving of almost two days as compared with the journey by sea or by train. We flew into the spice-laden air of Ceylon in the evening and I was taken off by the bishop to his large, dutch-style bungalow for a relaxed week-end.

That was the keynote of this visit, relaxation. The bishop believed in relaxation and was an expert in the art. Moreover, so far as he brought any pressure to bear upon his guests, he insisted that they too should share in the many forms of relaxation Ceylon had to offer. Sometimes this took the form of enjoying his garden, sometimes of going down to watch the elephants

<sup>1</sup> *Father Douglass of Behala*, p. 164.

being washed, and for one week-end a completely relaxed visit to Newara Eliya.

The pattern of the work in Ceylon and the experience of the Fathers who shared it varied little from year to year. For me it was a retreat for priests in Colombo and a retreat for the East Grinstead Sisters. Then, after the week-end at Newara Eliya, there was another retreat for priests at Kandy. Father Whitworth carried out a similar programme in August 1933, and as he wrote a series of most interesting letters describing his visit some extracts from them will help to convey an objective picture of some of the experiences this visit involved. The only major practical difference between his visit and my own was that he was a guest of the archdeacon of Colombo whilst I had the bishop as my host.

Father Whitworth first describes the beauty of Colombo and the bishop's chapel.

I had intended after some tea to make my way back to the church, but I was so overcome with the beauty of this place, its lovely garden and above all the beautiful chapel with the Blessed Sacrament reserved in a gorgeous gilded tabernacle, that I remained. I have not seen green lawns like here since leaving England and in spite of a great deal of traffic on the road the garden and house seem so quiet.<sup>1</sup>

He then goes on to describe St Thomas' School at Mount Lavinia where one of his retreats was held.

I am writing this from St Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia, and I wonder whether I can give you any description of it. At this time of year, being the end of the monsoon, the sea is a mass of white surf and great rolling waves which I can both hear and see from this house, and every morning before 6 a.m. I have run out of the house and plunged into this gorgeous water. Then the coast here is covered with great groves of coconut trees, like East Africa and, though I have no time for long walks, yet I can get a perfect hour in the evening in the midst of lovely surroundings.

St Thomas' College is like an English public school. Houses and playing fields, five courts and a swimming bath in building at the moment and the magnificent chapel, consecrated only about four years ago, capable I should think of holding a thousand boys without over-

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, October 1933.

crowding. The chief difference between this and an English school is that here the Catholic Faith is taught quite naturally.

From this school he went for a week-end rest to Newara Eliya, before going to Kandy for the second of his priests' retreats. He writes from Newara Eliya of a long walk he took into the jungle, after the morning Mass.

I started out again at ten o'clock, armed with sandwiches and thermos flask, determined to get a long walk and see something of the country; I missed the road along which I had been directed but finally had a magnificent tramp right into the heart of the jungle. In fact I became somewhat nervous as I seemed to get further and further away from any sign of civilization, but the only living creatures that I saw were monkeys. When I was sheltering on my way home in a small hut, the man told me the way was a very dangerous one that I had come and I might have run across wild elephants, which was disappointing; however, as I was only armed with an umbrella, perhaps it was just as well; but it was the same in Africa, for however near I got to lions I was never lucky enough to see one.

Father Whitworth concludes his vivid account with this description of Trinity College where he conducted the last retreat of his tour.

I am living in the Principal's bungalow which is really the most beautiful house, with the most wonderful views, surpassing anything I have ever seen. The beauty is almost overpowering, with the tropical vegetation and colours beyond description of both flowers and leaves and with magnificent mountains in the distance. I have seen nothing in Switzerland or Africa which can be compared with the loveliness of this place.

No wonder that when he compared his retreat addresses with these marvellous experiences of nature, he felt dissatisfied and wished he had been able to transfer Pleshey Retreat House and staff complete to Ceylon. Under those conditions he writes, "Those retreats would have been very different things."

As one sees again those Ceylon visits through the eyes of Father Whitworth, one is reminded how much we all shared in common as year after year one or other of the Fathers undertook this adventurous journey and surrounded by such beauty carried out this work.

The Chanda mission was another of my journeys. It was a paternal mission on a large scale, much larger than anything attempted by the Society either in Bombay or Poona. It was situated in what is now Madhya Pradesh, near the great jungle preserves of central India. Chanda was an old fortified city and the mission run by the Episcopal Church of Scotland was situated on a large estate outside the city. It had a large number of mission buildings, schools, hostels, a hospital, and quarters for the mission staff. Around this mission centre were scattered a number of outstations. At the time of my visit all this was administered by Father George Wells and his very able wife. He presided in effect over a kind of Christian diaspora, a congregation of Christian people living in the centre of Hinduism, in process of being prepared for a more independent life which they have now attained.

My work was to give the same retreat to two different groups in Marathi. Because my Marathi was so uncertain, I had first to write out all my addresses in English and then persuaded a friend in Bombay to translate them into his form of Marathi. My intention was to read them, but when I found myself in front of a very responsive congregation the usual currents of sympathy began to move between us and I found myself departing from my script and making up my form of Marathi as I went along. There was another reason, too. The women in retreat had all brought at least one baby at the breast into retreat with them and at the time there was an epidemic of whooping cough which I found many of these children were sharing. So it was very necessary to pause and get in my talk during the irregular spaces of silence.

Afterwards one of my retreatants told me that he liked it best when I left the scholarly and accurate Marathi of my translator behind and embarked on a Marathi of my own. It was, he explained, so much more interesting to us. I am quite sure that this was one of the polite understatements for which courteous India is famous.

But it was a great experience. The retreat addresses given in a tent, the congregation cross-legged on the floor, the certainty that although we so stumbly approached God he so surely approached us, making perfect through his presence our imperfections and speaking with the clarity of his word through the stammerings of our own. How vividly it all illuminated a saying

of Father Benson: "God does not want our words, but our hearts."

Chanda brought another experience: the jungle. It is the centre of a huge wild-life reserve. We took one day off to glimpse part of this wonderful jungle. To do this we journeyed down long forest paths in a large estate car until we came to a *dak* bungalow at Tardoba. This bungalow was built on the shores of a lake and in one of the nearby trees a *machan*, or observation platform, had been built so that we could sit there and watch unobserved the animals as they came to the lake for water. I spent a long time in this *machan* with John Towers and, although we shared Father Whitworth's disappointment in not seeing tigers, we saw lesser creatures such as wild pig and heard the marvellous harmonies of the jungle living its own life undisturbed by man. That night we drove down the same paths with the headlights full on and in their light glowed the eyes of many creatures, perhaps even of that tiger who chose to remain hidden during daylight and now showed himself in that darkness so vibrant with life and power. I had not then read de Chardin's *Hymn of the Universe*, but later, when I read this *Benedicite*, it brought back again all the emotions of that day.

Blessed be you, impenetrable matter: you who, interposed between our minds and the world of essences, cause us to languish with the desire to pierce through the seamless veil of phenomena. Blessed be you, mortal matter: you who one day will undergo the process of dissolution within us and will thereby take us forcibly into the very heart of that which exists. . . . You I acclaim as the inexhaustible potentiality for existence and transformation wherein the predestined substance germinates and grows.<sup>1</sup>

Calcutta, Ceylon, Chanda: these were some of my journeys and in making them I found myself travelling along paths used by other Fathers. There were other journeys too, made by other Fathers: journeys to Delhi to conduct retreats for the Fathers of the Community of the Ascension, to Lahore for missions, to Simla for chaplaincy duties, even as far afield as Burma by Father Nicholson; and during the second World War how far Father

<sup>1</sup> *Hymn of the Universe*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, p. 69.

Huntley, Father Wilkins, and Father Bean journeyed with their men.

During those ninety years the members of the Society left their footprints all over India. These journeys were an integral part of their contribution to the fulfilment of the Founder's vision and their results may well prove the most fruitful and enduring of all their work. The institutional work has already been transferred and is bound to change. It may even disappear. This other work at large in India was a writing upon people's hearts, an encounter between person and person. Already there are signs that it is work of this kind that will in the future survive and develop. Father Bishop has already undertaken a three-months' visit to India which reproduced parts of the ministry which has here been described. And we have strong hopes that his visit will be the first of many. There are also growing signs of communication between the Society and those who began to know the Fathers in India and are now visiting or settling in this country. The bread cast on the waters is returning home.

## 7

*Working with Others*

In a letter written some time in 1882, Father Founder described the kind of relationship that he wanted to exist between the members of the Society and the bishop in whose diocese they were called to serve: "The bishop ought to feel that he can act towards us with a hearty confidence in our simple cooperation."<sup>1</sup> The principle of simple cooperation always governed the relationship between the Fathers of the Society and the Bishops of Bombay. This did not mean that there was never any disagreement. On at least two occasions there was serious disagreement. But this was never allowed to interfere with the loyalty of the Fathers to their bishop and when they opposed it was always within the limits laid down by the diocesan regulations. This simple cooperation did not often receive public recognition, nor did it lead to important promotion. True, Father Wain held the office of Archdeacon of Poona for several years and the Father Provincial was a kind of *ex-officio* canon of the cathedral; but for most of the Fathers their life in the diocese of Bombay was a call "to be humble, not putting themselves forward".<sup>2</sup>

Mention has already been made of two occasions of disagreement. The first may be mentioned and soon disposed of: it was the St Peter's controversy.

In February 1907 Bishop Pym openly attacked certain beliefs

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, selected and arranged by O. Congreve and W. H. Longridge, Mowbrays, 1916, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and practices regarding the Blessed Sacrament and laid down requirements which gave practical force to his views. The breaking point was reached when he attempted to exclude the unconfirmed from the Eucharist. Neither the Bishop nor the Society would give way on this point and so an appeal was made to the Metropolitan, the Most Reverend R. S. Copleston, on 3 January 1908. He decided "that the attendance of unconfirmed children in church during the actual celebration of the Holy Communion does not necessarily imply any strange or false doctrine and cannot be legally prohibited."<sup>1</sup> This resolved the conflict and Father Elwin's concluding comment helps to take all the sting out of it and reveals the spirit with which it was undertaken: "Bishop Pym had the courage of his convictions and it is pleasant now to recall his many personal gifts and his natural kindness of heart."<sup>2</sup>

The other controversial disagreement was concerned with the reunion scheme for the Church of South India and took place many years later. The Church of South India was constituted on 27 September 1947, and when Father Gibbard of the Society visited South India in 1964 he wrote of the beginning of this Church, as he imagined it must have taken place, in the following description.

That morning after twenty-seven years of negotiations saw the inauguration of the first, and so far the only, Church to unite the episcopal and non-episcopal traditions. A congregation of 1500 from all over India, with friends from many parts of the world, packed St George's, and another 3000 worshipped in the pandal around the three open sides of the cathedral. Representatives of the Anglicans, the Methodists, and South Indian United Church (an earlier union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists) read from the chancel steps the resolutions of their Churches to enter union. The copies of the schemes of union, with the signatures of all the ministers, were laid together on the altar. The *Te Deum* was sung. Then the six Anglican bishops were commissioned to exercise the episcopal office throughout the new united Church. After a short break in the morning sunshine, the second service began, at which nine new Bishops were consecrated—two ex-Methodists and one ex-Presbyterian. The present Moderator, the Most Reverend A. H. Legg, was among the new bishops, and he has written, "All of us, whether we had been brought up in an episcopal Church or not, or

<sup>1</sup> *Thirty-Nine Years in Bombay City*, Fr. E. F. Elwin, Mowbrays, 1913. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

whether we had previously known episcopacy only from outside, had still to learn what episcopacy could and should mean for the Church in South India, for we were aware that something was being born."<sup>1</sup>

Something on that morning was indeed being born, and after twenty seven years of negotiations and many years of uncertainty and controversy it has gone on growing and is now strongly established. In these negotiations and uncertainty and controversy the Society had a full share.

It is easy at this stage of the ecumenical movement, with much more experience of reunion schemes and above all the material of Vatican II to draw on, to be unduly critical of the attitude of the Society towards the South India Church Reunion scheme. The Fathers in India had none of this experience to guide them. They were the local representatives of an opposition movement controlled in England under the name of the Council for the Defence of Church Principles. They had the task of expressing to the Church in India the theological conclusions of this council. Again, they had to face the immediate and practical result of the act of union in South India which was an act of disunion with the Church in North India and with the rest of the Anglican Communion. Large numbers of former Anglicans in South India now found themselves out of communion with the Church of their baptism. Many of these perplexed people came to the Fathers for counsel and there were no clearly expressed principles given by those in authority to guide them. But the most painful part of the controversy arose from the fact that the Bishop of Bombay warmly supported the scheme and was himself actively engaged in preparing a reunion scheme on somewhat similar lines for the Church of North India.

The Society expressed its opposition in whatever ways it could. Father O'Brien, the Superior General, spoke for the Fathers in England. In India Father Williams spoke for the Society there. A more immediately practical step was taken by sending Father Rangaswamy to Nandyal to assist in training ordinands for a part of the South Indian Church which had refused to enter the united Church. There he did work of outstanding importance while the other Fathers in India went on

<sup>1</sup> *Unity is not Enough*, S. M. Gibbard, S.S.J.E. (Mowbray), p. 38.



with their work, carrying a heavy burden of frustration and perplexity.

The form of these past controversies has now taken new shapes and we can look back on them with a clearer understanding and from this vantage point replan the battle in different ways. What remains in splendid relief, after all other mistakes have been rectified, is the chivalry which was practised by both sides. Father Williams waged his part of the conflict with the courtesy of a knight of the Round Table or a member of an English Test Team. The bishop on his side maintained the closest friendship and sympathy with all the Fathers, even when their views were most opposed. When he came to stay at the Mission House in Poona, it was a delight to share in an exercise of the deepest courtesy. To the bishop was given all the respect due to a representative of the apostolic ministry and from him was given to the Fathers all the grace and charm of a real Father in God. Other forms of controversy have replaced "this battle long ago", but never can one hope to see ecclesiastical warfare waged with more perfect chivalry than in those days of the founding of the Church of South India.

With relief these two disagreements can now be put on one side and we are free to consider the more positive acts of cooperation by the Society in India. Among these acts was a work of reconciliation between missionaries and the members of the Indian Ecclesiastical Establishment.

Until the granting of Independence in 1947 the Church in India was in practice divided into two parts. One part was made up of the missionaries and their flocks. The other part was made up of the clergy of the Indian Church Establishment with their soldiers and the members of the Indian Civil Service. Both parts were joined together by their bishops with each other and the see of Canterbury, but within this union were deep divisions based on differences of salary, service conditions, and prestige. Sometimes these divisions were acute. Mr Winston Churchill, when a subaltern in India, expressed the attitude of the establishment to the missionaries in one of his letters to his mother in which he described the work of missionaries as "a way of annoying the heathen". The missionaries on their side were often as critical and misin-

formed about their brethren of the Establishment and often at diocesan councils put questions about salaries which were embarrassing and unhelpful to chaplains who had problems to handle about which the missionaries were often very little informed.

It was as an intermediary between these two sections of the Church that the Society was able to carry out a valuable work. The Fathers lived easily in both camps and won the confidence of both the missionaries and the establishment chaplains. In the early days Father O'Neill achieved this at Indore where he ministered both to the residents of the cantonment and to the natives of the city. Other Fathers developed this reconciling work when they served as Army chaplains and were temporarily attached to the Indian Church Establishment. But it was in the Society's Mission Houses in Bombay and Poona that the work of reconciliation was most fully done. To these houses came the establishment chaplains and the Indian clergy and missionaries. All were equally welcomed and all were equally treated. These houses provided a community environment in which all felt at home.

The late Archdeacon Ashley-Brown has written warmly of this ministry:

No secular priest can write of the influence of the Cowley Fathers in the diocese of Bombay without heartfelt gratitude. We come to the Mission House in Bombay and Poona for our retreats and quiet days. As spiritual directors we find them understanding and balanced. They bring a contribution of the same wisdom and balance to the council of the diocese. As our theologians they are sound and reliable. As mission preachers they are always at our service. Whether our flocks be Indian, Anglo-Indian or European, civil or military, they always welcome the Fathers in their pulpits. Their lives of discipline and devotion lift high the standard of the priestly and pastoral life among us. The steel in the moral fibre of their lives undergirds our own. They set the step for their brethren in the ministry.<sup>1</sup>

It was Bishop Palmer who saw the need for an independent Church in India and carried out the negotiations through which it eventually came. His patience and statesmanship brought the Church in India to full independence on 22 December 1927 and it was his skill that framed the constitution.

<sup>1</sup> *On the Bombay Coast and Deccan*, W. Ashley Brown (S.P.C.K.), p. 221.

The prefatory statement to the constitution was warmly approved by the Society as stating beyond all doubt the intention of the independent Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon of remaining within the Catholic Church. The first paragraph of this statement said this clearly:

The Church of India, Burma, and Ceylon is a part of the one, holy catholic, and apostolic church, the body of Christ which he is building up out of all generations and races of men. We are what we are as a Church, and as members of the Church by reason of what we have received from him through and in the holy Catholic Church.

The Constitution was signed unanimously by the bishops of the fourteen dioceses and the representatives of the clergy and the laity of those dioceses at the general council held on 31 January 1930. The separation of the Church and State was effected on 1 March 1930 and Bishop Palmer's scheme for synodical government came into being.

In this new form of Church government the Fathers took an important share. At least one and often more of them served on the Standing Committee of the diocese. For many years Father Wain was Archdeacon of Poona and also an assessor during the Episcopal Synods.

Once the South India Reunion Scheme came into being many others of a similar kind began to proliferate within the Anglican Communion. In north India a scheme for uniting many separated Churches was formulated under the title of the North India Reunion Plan. In many ways this was sounder than its South India counterpart, but on several points the Fathers felt it their duty to oppose it and work for its amendment. This time the controversy was not so heated, since ample time was given for debate and revision. The crisis atmosphere of the earlier scheme was thus avoided.

A more cooperative experience of this time was the liturgical revision undertaken soon after 1947. This came to fruition in the production of a revised Indian Prayer Book. Father Wain and other members of the Society took an active part in this work.

Until 1947 the Society controlled the parishes of Holy Name, Rastas Peth, Kurla, Dharavi Dadar, and Umerkhadi. After that

date the diocese introduced a scheme of integration for all such missionary churches and parishes, giving it the rather ponderous title of "diocesanization". The Society wholeheartedly cooperated. A capital endowment of some £13,000 was set up as a partial endowment of these parishes in 1956, and some years before the rights of appointment of their parish priests were handed over to the bishop. Only one restriction was at that time made: a reverter clause was inserted in the Trust Deed setting up the endowment in the case of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon passing out of communion with Canterbury. This was later rescinded when the church buildings of these parishes were transferred to the diocese in 1965. By this slowly-maturing process of transfer the Society succeeded in handing over to the diocese a number of parishes in full working order and their subsequent growth has proved how wisely and securely this work was done.

Besides these many forms of cooperation between the Society and the Church in India, there was another cooperation of an individual and more hidden kind whose importance has still to be assessed. This was between the Society and Father Nehemiah Goreh, a man whom Father Benson predicted would "occupy the place in future Indian church history which we assign to such writers as Justin Martyr or Clement of Alexandria".<sup>1</sup>

Ordained priest on 18 December 1870, Father Goreh was sent by his bishop to start a mission at Chanda. Whilst there he developed strong leanings towards the ascetic life and, having heard of Father Benson's work in founding a religious order, he wrote asking him to send some of its members for work in India. He made his first contacts with the Society in India through Father O'Neill at Bankipore and later with Father Page in Bombay, and on 25 July 1876 was admitted as a novice of the Society. He continued as a novice of the Society until 1885. Then, whilst still maintaining the closest relationship with the Fathers in India, he engaged in more independent work until his death on 25 October 1895.

It was during his visit to England in 1876 that he read a paper at a missionary conference in connection with the S.P.G. at

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Father Goreh*, C. E. Gardner, S.S.J.B., Longmans, Green, 1900, p. ix.

Grantham on 26 November in which he pleaded for the establishment of religious communities in India "which should put before the native Christians a higher mode of life and stir them up to self-denial for God's sake". He said that there was work for all in India but that the religious life was the better way and the great need at that time.

Father Gardner finishes his biography of Father Goreh with this prophecy which has not yet been fulfilled:

He will live on so as to be the teacher of future generations, partly by his printed words, and partly by the living voice of those who have learnt the Christian faith from his lips. The wide-spread consequence of his gentle, prayerful life no one can estimate.<sup>1</sup>

Although Father Goreh never became a professed member of the Society and eventually withdrew from the novitiate, his relationship with the Fathers, both in England and India, was life-long and from them he drew much strength and encouragement in a life which tasted great loneliness and a temperament tending towards a depression which sometimes approached despair. A letter written by Father Benson to him at the time of his withdrawal from the novitiate illustrates the deep sympathy which developed between this great Indian Christian and the Society.

You must not think that we shall have any less affection for you because you go elsewhere. God has drawn us together and the love which has been formed during these years of our union is too sacred a thing to die out merely because you do not feel that you have a vocation for the Society. I hope you will let us still supply you with what may be needful in the way of food and raiment. There is no need for the world at large to know anything about your relation to us. Every one will doubtless still continue to call you Father Goreh, and there is no reason why they should not; only you will be perfectly free to undertake such works as you like, without any reference to any Superiors in the Society, and you will practise such devotions as you find most helpful. . . . It is, however, for you to settle what your future plans shall be, and Father Page will, I am sure, do his utmost to help you in carrying them out satisfactorily. . . . You will always be very dear to me, and I hope I shall hear from time to time what you are doing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Father Goreh*, C. E. Gardner, S.S.J.E., p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, pp. 208-9.

This letter reveals at what great depths of charity and understanding the Society cooperated.

But there was another form of cooperation between Father Goreh and the Society which grew out of his plea for the sending of religious orders to India. Several of them came or were formed in India itself. There were the Oxford Mission, the Cambridge Mission, the Cawnpore Brotherhood, the Dublin Mission, besides several Women's communities and the experimental and partly indigenous community in Poona known as the Christa Prema Seva Sangh. In all these communities Fathers of the Society ministered, sharing with them their experience of the religious life and giving them regularly spiritual help and encouragement through retreats.

Just as the full results of Father Goreh's life and work are in the future, so the desire which he shared for strong, indigenous religious communities in the Indian church has still to be realized. They have not appeared for want of belief in the need for them. All with any experience of the Indian church would share Father Goreh's conviction that they are essential to the strength and witness of the Indian Church. But, apart from the Franciscan experiment in Poona, no English community has succeeded in developing on a large scale an Indian form of the religious life which could meet the special needs of India. The experience of the Society with Father Goreh made it clear that such an Indian form of the religious life was needed as would meet the particular character and outlook of the Indian people. Father O'Brien believed that such a form would have to be the work of Indians themselves and that the most the Society could do would be to encourage those who embarked on this kind of exploration. This was indeed what was done by the Society in the case of Sadhu Sundar Singh, who explored a simple form of religious life for himself, but failed to transmit to a community. So far no other Indian Christian has pioneered the religious life with anything like the energy and glamour with which this great Indian ascetic carried out his task. Meanwhile the Society shares the conviction expressed a long time ago by Father Nicholson and continues to pray.

Were it not for one's faith in the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit

of God to build up the Church in India, it is difficult to see how it is going to be done. At any rate many prayers need to be offered that Sundar Singh's work may be overruled to the glory of God and for the building up of the Church in India.<sup>1</sup>

Here is an obvious way of continued working with others and as we respond we may confidently expect God to open new doors of service for the future.

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1918.

## 8

*Some Fellow-Workers*

The Religious Life is not merely a life of service to others. It is also a life of receiving service. Both experiences are needed in the formation of the truly humble and compassionate person. A one-way philanthropy, as G. K. Chesterton has shown in his usual vivid way, can breed a vicious condescension.

Heaven shall forgive you Bridge at dawn,  
The clothes you wear—or do not wear—  
And Ladies' leap-frog on the lawn  
And dyes and drugs and petits verres.  
Your vicious things shall melt in air . . .  
. . . But for the Virtuous Things you do,  
The Righteous Work, the Public Care,  
It shall not be forgiven you.<sup>1</sup>

The Fathers of the Society have been trained in the art of receiving as well as of doing good works, and nowhere was this reciprocal service more experienced than in their work in India.

Father O'Brien and his shipwreck in 1918 is an example. He never spoke of this experience in my hearing, but in his letter of 16 June 1918 there is a vivid description. It happened off Newfoundland, when he was travelling across the Atlantic in a convoy of ten ships with four escorting destroyers. Submarines were the primary danger of his voyage, and in the first stages of his journey he writes of exploding depth charges and smoke screens

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Religious Verse*. Selected by Timothy Beaumont, p. 15.

with some of the destroyers chasing a submarine away. Then, as they went up the Straits of Cabot, at eleven o'clock at night, they went on the rocks. At this point a passenger, who had considerable knowledge of seamanship advised the others not to take to the boats, and this advice probably saved many lives, for in the morning they found the ship surrounded by a reef of rocks at Pettit, not far from Port aux Basques, which would in the heavy seas have made short work of the ship's boats.

The next morning, while they waited for a relief boat to take them off, they were served with breakfast. And here Father O'Brien, with his reserved and factual description, gives us a classic example of understatement. He writes: "After a time we were cheered with the hope of breakfast which was served with the printed menu, and only one item scratched off. The one difficulty was to find fresh water as the tanks were flooded but, by the time we had eaten, tea was forthcoming."<sup>1</sup> Then followed a journey to North Sydney, an opportunity to return thanks for his deliverance, a fourteen hour journey to Boston and "the kindest welcome from Father Powell and Father Johnson, and later from Father Burton".

As one reads Father O'Brien's account it all sounds like a repetition of St Paul's experience, with the addition of destroyers and submarines, and as with St Paul there was a wonderful band of fellow-workers who either consciously or unconsciously co-operated to enable the Father to reach his journey's end.

This has always been the experience of individual Fathers. It has also been the experience of the Society as a whole. In all its work there have been the prayers and services of a great company of friends and through their help the work has been done.

In the early days of the Society's work in India, these helpers were very loosely organized, even when they were organized at all. It was not until 11 October 1892 that they were brought together into a missionary association called the Missionary Association of St Mary and St John. Later, in 1911, this association became the Missionary Association of St Mary and St John in India, with the subtitle of Cowley Wantage Indian Missions. This change was made to enable the association to include in its work the new

<sup>1</sup> *Cowley Evangelist*, June 1918.

Mission House in Bombay. In 1914 the All Saints Sisters were included in the association and once more the name was changed, this time to the Association of St Mary and St John and All Saints for India. Finally, in 1919, the work of the Cowley Fathers and Wantage Sisters in South Africa was included and the association was given its present title of Cowley Wantage and All Saints Missionary Association for India and South Africa.

In this adult form the association worked for the next forty years, supporting the Fathers and Sisters in their missionary work both in India and Africa. It was a varied work. Through many local branches and branch secretaries the work was made known and the interest of many parishes stimulated. Every year there was an annual festival in London, with special speakers and public meetings. The main part of the organization was carried out at a central office with a succession of splendid secretaries, who from London and in later years from Oxford organized propaganda, kept accounts, and encouraged in innumerable ways the overseas Fathers and Sisters. It would be impossible to name them all, but there are some who stand out vividly in the memories of those who served with them. Of these, the most recent were Miss Alethea Graham and Mrs B. Boyd Maunsell. No missionary association could have been given more loyal and efficient service.

The next change in the association came in 1956. In that year the Fathers withdrew from Bombay and the Community of All Saints from India. From that date the overseas work of the Sisters of All Saints came to an end, but this community continued to support the association and the Mother General still served on the committee. The Constitution was revised to meet this change and its objects described as "to collect funds, organize branches and in any other way to further the work in India and South Africa of the Cowley Fathers and Wantage Sisters".

Another change came in 1965, when the Society of St John the Evangelist reluctantly began to prepare for its withdrawal from India and decided to reduce its work in South Africa. It was recognized that provision would have to be made to subsidize for some years the transferred institutions, yet eventually these financial obligations would disappear. This would make the association's financial support no longer necessary.

From 1963 to 1966, a series of discussions was held to make plans to meet this change. The first was on 12 July 1964, when it was agreed to modify the association from that of a fund-raising body to a holding company. A further meeting between the Superiors and Assistant Superiors of both communities was held on 29 December 1965 when more definite proposals were drawn up and passed as formal resolutions by the General Committee at its meeting on 10 February 1966. These came into force on 9 January 1967. They arranged that the association should cease actively to raise money and for the transference of its investments in equal proportions to the two communities.

At the time of these changes the following letter was sent to all branch secretaries. It is worth quoting in full, for it expresses the gratitude of the Society for all the support given through the association.

The recent decisions of the members of the C.W.A.S. have been taken to meet changes in the work of the two communities it has been supporting.

The Society of St John the Evangelist has considerably modified its missionary work. In South Africa it has closed its house in Cape Town and reduced its work at St Cuthbert's. In India, after transferring its properties and institutions, it has planned a complete withdrawal.

Both the communities are convinced of the need to shape their future missionary work on more individual lines, and this will involve the use of capital of the association and the making of future appeals separately in the name of each community rather than in the name of the association. To meet these changes the association has unanimously agreed to cease actively raising funds for the two communities in its own name and to transfer its capital to them. May I emphasize that because of these changes the association has not been wound up. It will continue in being and will deal with any donations or legacies which will be divided, unless earmarked, in equal proportions between each community. Its affairs will be managed by the Superiors General of the communities, and its members will be the professed members of both communities.

Changes are always difficult. The older members of the association have inevitably found themselves regretting this diminishment of C.W.A.S. But whilst looking back to the past it is right to look

forward with hopeful confidence to the future. "The Lord hath done great things for us already: whereof we rejoice."<sup>1</sup>

The English fellow-workers of the Society in its missionary work had their counterparts in India. In Bombay there was a great company of such helpers, variously organized, both of men and women who gave valuable service. In Poona there was another company, smaller and less organized, but of equal value.

Among the Bombay company certain people and groups stand out with special prominence. There was a succession of Bishops of Bombay, from Bishop Douglas to Bishop Robinson, who gave the Fathers unfailing support and sympathy. Among them were Bishop Palmer whose far-seeing statesmanship gave the Indian Church independence at a time when political independence was no more than a dream dreamed by very few. There was Bishop Acland who was on terms of close friendship with Father Williams. There was Bishop Lash whose visits to the Mission Houses in Bombay and Poona were always occasions of good talk and invigorating laughter. And there was Bishop Robinson, a real New Testament Bishop, given to hospitality. I shall always remember that hospitality, given on the day when I flew back to England, when he came down in the early morning to say farewell and arranged for his car to take me to the airport. Such kindness softened the hardship of parting and left memories of deep happiness.

The most important group of Bombay helpers was the Society of St Peter. This Society was founded by the joint efforts of Mr Oscar Brown and Father Whitworth to help the work of St Peter's Hostel. For many years Mr Oscar Brown was the chief Presidency Magistrate in Bombay and when he had an official office the monthly meetings of the Society were always held there. Under his guidance and often with his persuasion the Society of St Peter attracted much support from the business men in Bombay. Each year there was an annual appeal and donations were received from all the European business firms and many Indian ones as well. From its funds the Society of St Peter made generous grants towards the running expenses of the hostel. Its members also gave help of other kinds. Expert advice was given

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 126.3.



on the running of the hostel and each month one of its members made a visit of inspection and wrote up a report with recommendations which were considered at the next meeting of the committee. The work of this Society goes on and provides a strong support to the Principal of the hostel and his staff.

The work of the Society of St Peter was complemented by other bodies in Bombay. There were the British and American Women's Associations. These were formed by the wives of business men in Bombay to raise money for charities. For many years both associations contributed generously to the funds of St Peter's Hostel. There was also a Ladies' Committee which worked in conjunction with the Society of St Peter and helped to supervise the domestic side of the hostel. The name of Mrs N. Polson will always be associated with this committee. Throughout her stay in Bombay she ran this committee and her help and encouragement were unfailing during dark days when the hostel problems seemed insuperable. Then there were those employers in Bombay who helped give employment to hostel boys and were prepared to forgive more than seventy times seven the many failures they were given.

It was Father O'Brien's experience all over again. No sooner was a need revealed than people from all kinds of places and with all kinds of skills rushed in to help. One of the Fathers in Poona is reputed to have written a pamphlet entitled *The last Pice*. There is no doubt that once published the last pice did not stay on its own for long. The need had only to be made known to be supplied.

What happened in Bombay also happened in Poona. There the help was less organized but no less generous. There was a group called "The Friends of Panch Howd," who met once a year and gave a regular contribution to the missionary work of Panch Howd. There were the men who came forward to serve on the managing committees of the transferred institutions. There were our friends in the Army who in the days of Father Wilkins collected and sent the instruments to form the hostel band. From the Governor of Bombay downwards the mission work of Panch Howd received regular and generous help.

Another service needs to be mentioned. In India the Fathers were dependent upon a domestic staff to run the Mission House.

This brought loyal help of another kind. In Bombay there were Mittu and Joseph. Whatever the opposition might be outside, one could always be sure of their support, and they never forgot a detail. And in Poona there were Bhimaji and Bhissey. Bhimaji never became a Christian, but he gave service of Christian standard to at least two generations of Fathers. And when he was replaced by Bhissey and his large family the same tradition continued. There was one difference. Bhissey was a Christian of Methodist tradition and on one's birthday he would insist on putting on a garland and reciting a long prayer over the Father concerned. If service is the highest rank in the ranking of heaven, then these servants occupy very exalted places indeed.

About 1900 Edward Wilson wrote this about servants which has always seemed to apply to those splendid servants who gave us of their best in India:

What a huge responsibility we who employ servants in any way incur by doing so. . . . They are giving us time to ourselves to use as we like, usefully or wastefully, busily or idly. In no sense does our paying them alter the case—it is purely a matter of time, not money. . . . Each one of them is doing a little of my drudgery and thereby giving me time for other work. They are all fulfilling their side of the bargain; they are at drudgery day after day from morning to night. Cooks, housemaids, bootboys, gardeners, labourers, milkmen, dustmen, postmen, clerks, agents—in hundreds and hundreds—who have given their lives to save time for the few; and one by one we, the few, will be brought face to face with them and asked what we have done with our lives, and the time they gave us, to make the world better.<sup>1</sup>

Each Father who lived in India and received service from these Indian servants will find a special echo in these thoughts of Wilson. How often one came in tired to find the room tidied and welcoming. How often the slightest detail was remembered and gladly done for one's comfort. How often one's depression was dispelled by Bhimaji's glad smile of welcome. They served us well and they gave us time for the ministry of the gospel. One can only go on being grateful for what they did and take the same care of the time they and others like them provide as Edward Wilson did in his lifetime of planned service.

<sup>1</sup> *Edward Wilson of the Antarctic*, George Seaver, p. 70.

# 9

## Discoveries

In a remarkable essay entitled, "Sensuality and Substance",<sup>1</sup> Charles Williams discusses the intimate relationship between the physical and spiritual in human experience. He quotes Wordsworth's phrase about their relationship as having "a strength of usurpation", and goes on to quote Wordsworth's description of that usurpation:

When the light of sense  
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
There harbours.

And he himself asserts that "it is the vast union of visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, which is the real business of exploration—anyhow for Christians". In other words, he claims that the whole universe is a sacrament in which are combined things visible and invisible and that the great moments of exploration are when the outward envelope wears thin and the hidden glory shines through.

There is no doubt that during the Society's stay in India many of the Fathers made explorations of this kind and recorded their own discoveries. These discoveries break through over and over again in their letters.

An example of this comes almost unconsciously in Father Williams' letter of 15 September 1922, in which he describes some of his experiences during a visit to Ceylon. He is writing of

<sup>1</sup> *Theology*, May 1939.

journeys in rickshaws and says: "One gets about in rickshaws in Ceylon. It is very convenient, but I never quite get reconciled to having the Image of God between the shafts of a cart." Here is insight into the essential mystery, a moment of physical awareness in which the invisible world is revealed, and in that light the real horror of this use of the human body is struck out white-hot.

The Father Founder shews insight of a similar kind in a letter he wrote from the steamer "Getting towards Bombay", on 22 November 1890.

It is difficult to conceive that those urchins who seem to be made simply to live in the water can have been made to live on earth as their probation and in heaven as their reward, just like ourselves. But so it is. One must realize how truly they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, just like ourselves; and they have not rejected the claims of that precious blood so much as some of the white-skinned travellers on board, who perhaps look contemptuously upon them.

When one remembers that Father Benson trained the Society to pray for the heathen as "perishing in their ignorance", here was a break through the limitations of logic in the presence of the revealing flash of the invisible world.

India provided such flashes of insight for us all and looking back on them one finds they enriched one's understanding of the invisible and intangible and led to discoveries it is only fair to share with others. A handful of these experiences will give some idea of the rewards India has still to offer those who come humbly to explore. From my memory I select the case of the Indian servant, the leper parents, the thorn in a boy's foot, the ex-Brahmin priest, the blind boy, the drowning dog, and, as a final glory, the Taj Mahal in the morning sunshine.

The Indian servant was a gift from the Indian Army. The Army in those days had two ways of providing its officers with help in dealing with the practical problems of life: one was to detail to every officer a man for this duty, the other, very common in India, was to permit a number of Indian civilians to volunteer for this service and leave the officer free to make his choice.

It was the second method which was in force in the demobilization camp at Deolali, when I arrived in June 1946 to prepare to return to England. My Indian volunteered from a crowd eager

for this service, and it must have been his aggression that won him the job. But once secure in his service, his manner changed and he took me over during those ten days I was waiting for orders to embark for home.

I deliberately describe his service as "a taking over". Once he had been chosen, I became his possession. He made himself responsible for every detail of my life. He took over my clothes and arranged with the tailor and *dhobi* for them to be mended and cleaned. He slept near my bed, brought the morning tea, and was always there to welcome me whenever I returned to my room. We did not share a language, our religions were very different, and yet between us there grew up an understanding too deep for words. On one occasion this sympathy became a flash of insight, a moment of unforgettable glory.

I had been out all day and returned late in the afternoon, tired as only the heat and pre-monsoon can make you. Immediately he was there. His ministry was performed like a liturgy. He helped me take off the heavy Army boots and then he performed that extra service which in recollection now stands out with that "strength of usurpation" of which Wordsworth writes. He knelt down and massaged my aching feet and in that action took away all tiredness and opened my eyes to the full glory of manhood, expressing itself in perfect service. For the first time I realized that subtle addition to St John's gospel. Not merely that Jesus "washed their feet", but that "he began to wash the disciples' feet"; and in that action I saw the same process going on through this man who was serving, and experienced the unspeakable privilege of this service. There was revealed the unbroken succession of ministry as through other hands the same Lord and Master ministered, and the opportunity of becoming also an instrument of that same ministry when my own time had come.

Whatever love and understanding of Indian people later grew in my heart was planted then.

Philip was a leper who died of this disease when he was seventeen. We brought him back to the Mission House, Panch Howd, a few days before he died, and Father Bishop and I shared the privilege of ministering at a holy death which brought peace at the last. On the day of the funeral I was given the job of driving Philip's

parents, both of them lepers, to the parish cemetery in Salisbury Park, some two miles from Panch Howd, where Philip was to be buried. They sat in silence in the back of the car on a white sheet which had been placed over the seat to reduce the risk of infection.

The cemetery was a large piece of ground, with an entrance some ten yards from the path. It was surrounded by a strong thorn hedge. I stopped the car opposite the cemetery entrance and waited for Philip's parents to get out and walk to the grave. They stepped out cautiously on to the path, their feet badly diseased and bound in old rags. It was at this moment that this dark scene was transfigured into a blaze of radiant glory. A man came forward and started to walk slowly in front of them. As he did so, he stooped down every so often to remove the large thorns from their way. No command had been issued, as in the case of Simon of Cyrene. It was done spontaneously and in silence. It was an act of anonymous service. In this act, sorrow was changed into joy and as we shared with those parents in their moment of death it became also for us a statement of resurrection.

After the funeral I took the parents home and never saw them again, but this act in which we all shared still shines in my memory with an unfading light. If the gift of cold water brings union with the Lord, how much more the removal of thorns from his way.

Long walks were part of the regular programme during the summer camps at Karla. In my days, the Indian boys always walked barefoot, their feet taking the shape of the stones over which they walked. Only the Fathers wore shoes. Although the boys never fell, thorns and wounds in the feet were a common experience and to deal with them the Father in charge usually carried a safety pin for any emergency. This was often sufficient, except on this occasion.

The thorn had embedded itself deep in the boy's heel and resisted all attempts of the safety pin to dislodge it. There was no question of being able to continue the walk until the thorn had been removed. It was then that an Indian woman came along. She moved with noiseless grace and deep stillness, watching and waiting to be asked. I pointed to the boy's foot and asked her help. At once she became animated. She drew her long needle from its

case, took the boy's foot firmly in her strong hand and swiftly extracted the thorn. As she did so the miracle occurred. It may have been a trick of the evening light or a sudden unveiling of a mystery which is always about us, but as the woman put away the needle and handed back the boy there passed over her face a look of infinite compassion so that you might say she almost became transparent and the Spirit of God glowed. "Christ in us the hope of glory." St Paul teaches us to say this with confidence and we rightly claim this as our Christian right. But he did not confine this mystery to the baptized and the whole life of our Lord leads us to look for him in all his people. Certainly in that moment he shone through this woman and used her as one of the instruments of his compassion. It was a much-needed reminder that without our help and often in ways beyond our understanding he was coming to India and using those who had still to recognize him in his work of making all things new.

Another form of this ministry was to an older boy and through an Indian parish priest. Again, this happened in camp. This time it was in Kirkee, in the school compound where some thirty boys were camping. The school was closed and the boys were sleeping in one of the classrooms, stretched out on small *sattranjis* or sleeping mats on the floor. In the middle of the night, one of the older boys woke up screaming that he was being pulled into the river by evil spirits. We lit the oil lamp and tried to reassure him. We used all the ways we knew to persuade him that it was only a dream and that he should sleep again. It was no use. He had been too badly shaken to be able to sleep again. In the middle of this fear and confusion the parish priest came in. He was an old and slight man, almost blind, and had to use his son to help administer the chalice on Sundays. At once he understood the boy's need. He put his hands on him and gave him God's blessing with the simple strength of one who knew he was the instrument of God. Peace at once came into that room and into the heart of that boy. He was soon asleep again and we went back to bed.

This was not something to be seen. It was too dark for that and Indian lamps give little light. But it was a power to experience, the power of God's peace living, as John Donne once wrote, in a

temple "but of mudde walls, and condensed dust", moving through this priest into our hearts, overcoming evil, making God present and revealed. In these days of uncertainty about the ministry and the purpose of the Church, that moment of darkness and confusion transformed into an environment of peace does more than any amount of discussion and conference report to express the essence of that ministry and its power.

"Can one blind man be guide to another? Will they not both fall into the ditch?" True indeed, but one evening outside of Poona I saw a slight variation on this saying which changed its meaning. One man with sight can be guide to another without sight and both then reach the city.

It was sunset, the time when children in India drive buffaloes to the river for their evening bath. I was walking towards a village when I met a herd of clumsy, meditative buffaloes being urged to the river by two boys, shouting, gesticulating, and running behind them. They seemed unusually close together, they seemed almost to be sharing in a three-legged race, their arms tightly round each other. As they passed me, I saw the reason. One of them was blind.

In the silence of the walk home, many of the great invisibles became visible. The Church and her Head, Christ and the soul, the Church and the world: this was a parable of them all. Being made a "very member incorporate" was like that: his sight transforming our blindness, our stumbling pilgrimage to the city being made into a joyful and confident race, because of himself as the other partner, lending his sight to illuminate our blindness.

There is a bridge in Poona across the river which connects the mission activity of Panch Howd with the mission activity of Yerandawana. For most of the year the bridge seems almost superfluous, for the river bed is almost empty. But during the three months of the monsoon it becomes a deep torrent. I was crossing this bridge one evening, when the river was in full flood. Half-way across I noticed a small crowd of Indians looking over the bridge and walked over to share their curiosity. They were watching the struggles of a dog in the flood below. He obviously had no chance for, attracted by the group of people on the bridge,

he was trying to swim against the current in his efforts to reach them. Even had he got that far, there was nothing we could do. Some twenty feet separated us and the current made any attempt to swim to his help impossible. He swam on courageously, sometimes making a few feet towards us and then being swept away again, and all the time getting weaker. I longed for the river to win and end this futile struggle.

And then it happened. A boy from the far bank started to whistle. Immediately everyone stopped talking. The shrill urgency of his call came across the water. The dog paused in his struggle, then ignored it and continued swimming desperately. The boy whistled again. Once more the dog paused. One could almost feel him think. He then deliberately surrendered to the current. He was at once swept away in a broad arc, bobbing helplessly into the deepest part of the river. It was then that we began to realize the boy's wisdom. He was calling from a point on the bank to which the current was moving, and as the dog was swept along we saw that he was being taken, without any further effort of his own, to safety. In a few moments he was shaking himself dry on the bank and walking away with his master.

One of the remarkable things about Indians is the way they absorb an experience like that in a kind of silent unconcern. In a few moments the crowd had disappeared and all was again normal, but here was, for those who could see, a door opened into the deepest mystery of obedience. It was the dog's absolute response to a call which brought him to safety. Heroic struggle was not enough. In fact, until he obediently surrendered to what seemed death, he could not be saved. Only the child could see that, as he posted himself on that part of the bank and called the dog through the extremity of danger. It was all hidden from us old and wise spectators on the bridge and, as so often happens, revealed and obeyed by that child.

When Father Benson visited the Taj Mahal for the first time in February 1891, he described it as "perfectly marvellous", and then went on to give a wonderful picture of its beauty.

Nature works along with art. The beautiful blue sky, the dark foliage of the cypresses and the tropical plants in the surrounding gardens, the waters in the long basins and channels, some of white marble and

others of red sandstone, reflecting the central object, seem as an orchestra carefully trained to emphasize a voice of witchery whose melodious sadness holds the listener hushed.<sup>1</sup>

After this magnificent piece of descriptive writing, the moralizing about Shah Jehan and death which follows seems strangely out of place, as also his immediate reaction of resting some time in the garden and writing some notes on the psalms as he sat by the marble basin. True, it was six o'clock in the morning and the Father was old and fixed in his ways, but it would be a fair criticism to say that he did not allow this mighty work of art to have its full effect. How otherwise could he have gone on in the same letter to compare the Taj to Keble college and the Sarah Acland Institution, and give the advantage to those Oxford buildings. He concluded this visit by singing the office of None and found it "a pleasure to make the arches resound with a *Gloria Patri*, as one stood where the Moulvie used to read the Koran".<sup>2</sup>

Father Benson visited the Taj again some four months later, when he saw it by moonlight. This time he describes it as "a dream-like structure which seemed ready to melt into the grey moonlight atmosphere and stood out amidst the renewed brightness with all the wonderful reality of daylight".<sup>3</sup>

Once more he allowed himself to moralize on the worthlessness of Islam and the immense improvement of Christianity on all other religions. He came back to the reality of daylight by approving of Bishop French and the fact that he was engaged when he died on a translation of St Hilary de Trinitate.

The Taj Mahal is the most famous memorial in the world. It was built by Shah Jehan between 1632 and 1650 as a tomb for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Built of white marble, it is reputed to have cost more than £3,000,000.

This building has been for me an increasing experience. It continues to be "an emotion recollected in tranquillity" and contributes a growing influence on my deepest thinking.

My journey to the Taj began at the end of a glorious holiday at Naini Tal on the evening of 30 June 1965. I had left the bus centre at Naini Tal with a *Te Deum* in my heart and from there

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

made the long descent to Kathgodam. From there I journeyed in the overcrowded night train to Agra, reaching Agra Fort station at 5.40 a.m., cold and depressed in a grey dawn.

It was only after I had got my luggage on to the platform and the train was moving out of the station that it was explained I should have gone on to the next station. There was no alternative but to hire a cycle rickshaw and make my way through the most appalling slums I had seen anywhere in India and that at the worst possible time, when Indians are getting ready to face another day. Even with a river nearby and in the country, the Indian is not at his best in the early morning. Without a river and in these slums, the result is best left to the imagination. By the time I reached the station I should have used, my senses were in a complete state of disorder.

But perhaps this was the best preparation for my first view of the Taj. At Agra station I transferred from the rickshaw to a taxi and within a few minutes I was outside the main entrance to the gardens of the Taj, eager to see its beauty.

The approach to the Taj is through three gates. It was through the last of these gates that I shared the same experience as the Father Founder many years ago. He described it in this way:

As you enter you see it framed by the dark red archway, with nature's massive greenery and bright aerial blue. It stands before you in its delicate purity, with many a line of inlaid colour, faint enough to destroy the harsh solidity of absolute whiteness, without letting it lose its pure lustre. It seems as if it were like thistledown that could be blown away, but there it stands unchangeably the same. It appeals to the eye somewhat as a range of Alpine snows seen far away amongst the snows.<sup>1</sup>

So it seemed to me, through the last gateway, a mass of delicate marble, almost floating and stained with crimson by the warm rays of the rising sun.

Before I mounted the massive marble platform on which the building rests, a paid government servant covered my shoes to protect the marble surface. Then he led me into the main hall, a miracle of proportion and light. Another servant gave me a small flower and sang one note to show how the building could

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 61.

prolong and amplify the slightest sound given to it. From there another man led me to the crypt where the bodies of Shah Jehan and his wife are buried. Only here an incongruity occurred. As we descended into the darkness, instead of switching on some cleverly designed lighting to enhance the beauty of the building, this man handed me a hurricane lamp, and it was in its flickering and uncertain light that I came to the heart of the building.

Incongruous no doubt it was, yet did not this more adequately reveal the secret than any amount of clever concealed lighting? The heart of the building was a dark centre, a point of mystery like the heart of man. To it, through many doors, like the pilgrims of St Theresa's Interior Castle, one was led. By this interpretation the Taj Mahal became a kind of model of man and a guide to his growth in prayer.

But there was another interpretation from outside. Here the building seemed a kind of cosmic centre, focusing creation, something which visualized the thought behind Wordsworth's description:

There I beheld the emblem of a mind  
That feeds upon infinity.<sup>1</sup>

Here was a model of man in his cosmic significance, "a little lower than the angels, to be crowned with glory and worship".

This building remains the climax of many discoveries in India, a sacrament of deep healing, the end of a long journey of exploration. And this miracle of marble continues its work in the dark places of the mind, with its reassurance that the end of darkness is light and that discord resolves into harmony, that beauty reveals God and that an ordered pattern of perfection is growing out of this perplexing and untidy world.

<sup>1</sup> *The Prelude*, Book XIV, Wordsworth.



# 10

## *Instruments of Mission*

Every generation has its own ways of proclaiming the Gospel. There was one method in apostolic times, another in the age of the Fathers, another during the periods of expansion into the northern countries of Europe. The differences were obviously necessary in order to meet the different conditions, but underlying them there were also certain principles which continued to be valid for all times. There is always a tendency for the new generation in discovering its own methods to underrate those of its predecessors. This is particularly true of these times. The great wisdom is to make the new discoveries and at the same time take the unchanging principles from the past, to bring forth things new and old. It is because there are methods in the past which have their place in the present and future that it is worth taking the trouble to examine how the gospel was proclaimed by our Fathers and, whilst being bold enough to reject some of what they did, to be generous in using their discoveries in setting our own course into the future. A study of the instruments of mission used by the Society of St John the Evangelist in India need not be merely a piece of irrelevant research tinged with an attitude that we are now the people and have outgrown these ways: it can supply some valuable guidelines for the rather perplexing times in which we have been called to proclaim our faith.

Father Benson was essentially a religious, but in him the missionary side of his vocation was strongly developed. True, he was never able to express this to the extent that he desired, but

during his years as Superior, tied to the Mission House in Oxford, burdened with the task of administering a growing community, he courageously sent others to active missionary work and brooded on the principles by which this work should be done. From his cell in Oxford a regular stream of letters went out to his missionary sons. From them it is possible to construct a pattern of the ways in which he trained these men and to formulate the principles by which he believed missionary work should be done. We find him especially concerned with the truth to be proclaimed and the instruments through which it should be done.

In an early letter to Father Hall, Father Benson laid down the principle of loyal obedience to the contemporary forms and practice of the Church. But this did not mean for him a blind and inflexible obedience to mere written formulae and customs. It was to be a living obedience to the Holy Spirit, speaking both through the Church and through the environment where the gospel was to be proclaimed.

As for being loyal to Church of England principles, I hope we always have been; but it is a phrase which admits of some misconception. It cannot mean being loyal to the exact phraseology for praise or blame of any particular age, as Edward VI, or Charles II. There is no reason why we should be loyal to any particular age. Our loyalty is due to Truth, and to the great principle of Truth which the Church of England enunciates, i.e. the tradition of the undivided Church especially the first five centuries. Truth will be differently apprehended, attacked, and maintained in different ages. The same Truth will be expressed with a certain variety of phrase, and sometimes the wrong word of one age will become the right word of another, as in the case of *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *homousia*. The fourth century was not disloyal to the second or the third.<sup>1</sup>

There is an application of this principle in the attitude of the Report of the Missionary and Ecumenical Council to the Church Assembly in 1968. In one section of this report occurs this advice: "Thus the Church renews its obedience to God in mission. To do so it must sit light to its organization and structure, realizing that they must serve the gospel and not limit it."<sup>2</sup>

The Fathers in India followed the Founder's advice and kept a

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>2</sup> *One Mission*. Report by the Missionary and Ecumenical Council. C. A. 1966, p. 5.

sensitive and flexible attitude to the forms of the Truth they were sent to proclaim. This enabled them to experiment with new ways of presentation, deliberately adapted to the needs of the people they taught, without in any way compromising their message. In Poona this led to the incorporation into worship of certain Indian forms. Their method of outdoor preaching in the early days was based on some of the Hindu teaching methods. Readings from the Bible were interspersed with the singing of *bhajans*; and the use of dramatic techniques was in harmony with the way many Hindu festivals were celebrated. Many of the Fathers will have memories of these Christian dramas, lasting at least four hours and going on well into the night. The Conversion of St Paul, performed in St Luke's compound, was of this kind, but there were shorter and simpler performances. The parable of the Prodigal Son as rendered by the junior boys was unforgettable, with the smallest boys scurrying under an army blanket to represent the pigs. In India one never quite knew the form in which the Truth would be manifested, but somehow or other it shone.

This sitting light to organization and structures, which so often characterized the way the Fathers preached the gospel in India, was both primitive and a faithful expression of the Founder's teaching; and yet how modern it is too, and how it finds approval in the latest consideration of missionary strategy.

One of the main instruments for proclaiming the Truth was in the teaching of Father Benson the witness of a fully mature and consecrated Christian life. The Rule of the Society was framed to train such men. In it was the statement that "Above all things it is necessary for those who would carry out the work of missions to abide in Christ, apart from whom we can do nothing, and if we abide in him the life which we have must show itself in acts of love to all mankind."

Father Benson's earliest plan was that this life should be as "oriental in every habit and mode of life as possible". This was never achieved and perhaps it was the wisdom of the Fathers who realized from the experience of living in India the impossibility of Europeans reproducing with any conviction the modes of life natural to their Indian brothers. But they manifested their life in Christ with a variety of forms and with considerable freedom.

There was Father O'Neill with his stark poverty and simplicity. There was Father Playne with his imaginative approach to the needs of the Indians working in industry and agriculture. Father Wilkins was able to identify with the Indian soldier and Father Wain had a wonderful capacity to communicate with the scientist. It was a rich manifestation of the life hid with Christ in God and its results are by no means yet completed. "Not sufficient thought has been given to the argument that the Church in mission does not require merely money and structures. It needs to be poor, to travel light, and to be flexible."<sup>1</sup>

Poor, travelling light, and flexible were all accurate descriptions of Father O'Neill, yet this was not the only form of mission work needed, nor is it the only type of the consecrated life. Within the Society, and of equal value with this pattern, were men of other kinds: Father Nicholson and Father Whitworth, administrators who made and used structures of considerable complication for the work of mission; Father Huntley with his outstanding gifts of personal evangelization; Father Wilkins with his power to get alongside almost everyone he met.

Father Benson recognized all these forms of abiding in Christ and working for him; and in spite of his frequently expressed suspicion of large institutions and dependence on money and structures for preaching the gospel, he could recognize that they had their place. He once wrote of such institutions: "We have to set forth Christianity in its corporate life by institutions such as we have in Poona . . . schools, Christian and efficient, really educating the whole child are what we want in order to train up a people prepared for the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

The most powerful of all instruments for proclaiming the gospel in India was, according to Father Benson, the community life. The gospel could not adequately be proclaimed by individual preachers, no matter how outstanding their power, but through groups of men, living closely together in the energy of prayer. This conception he outlined in his original plan for mission work in India in his letter to the Warden of St Augustine's College, and it was this instrument that he developed to the full through the Society he founded.

<sup>1</sup> *C. A.* 1676, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, pp. 68-9.

In taking this view Father Benson showed a deep understanding of the needs of the Indian people. They too had their forms of the religious life and they too had their deep insights into prayer. Christianity needed to come to them in these forms, if it were to awaken and meet their greatest needs.

The religious life in India has taken many forms, from the wandering sadhu continually on pilgrimage, whom Kipling so vividly describes in *Kim*, to the Ashram type of mixed community developed with such genius by Gandhi in his religious families at Wardha and Sevagram. Many regret that the Society was never able to modify its form of the religious life in India sufficiently to incorporate more clearly some of the Indian forms, but it always recognized these other forms and on many occasions tried to foster their growth in Christian ways. Meanwhile the Fathers did the best they could by living and making available their own form of the religious life in their houses in Bombay and Poona.

The root of the failure to reproduce the religious life in a more Indian form arose from the fact that the Society never succeeded in attracting a sufficient number of Indian members which would have justified such a modification of its life and rule to produce an authentic Indian religious community. Father Rangaswamy was the one Indian Father to join the Society and finish his course and he courageously adapted himself to a form of religious life which in many ways was alien to his Indian background. We may hope and pray that the creation of a truly Indian form of the religious life is one of the good things of the future and that when it comes the Indian Church will be ready to recognize and wisely use this most powerful missionary instrument.

It was a community closely knit together through prayer which was the essence of Father Benson's vision. He once wrote to Father O'Neill: "The language to convert India . . . the language of heaven . . . prayer."<sup>1</sup> And this was the language which was used faithfully by the Society throughout its life in India and through which it still works for that country now.

The prayer used by the community was the full monastic form, vocal and mental, corporate and individual. Father Benson described the strength of the mission as "a constant cry of prayer", and this kind of prayer was the Society's source of

<sup>1</sup> *Further Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p. 38.

power, the energy which neutralized the poverty of its resources and numbers.

The prayer of each day was based on the pattern used at the Mother House. There were Mattins, Lauds, and Prime, followed by Mass. This began at 5.45 a.m. Often Mass involved a journey to one of the outstations such as Nanded, Yerandawana, or Panvel. After a light breakfast there followed an hour's mental prayer. The Lesser Hours were said at regular and convenient times during the day. Evensong came before supper and afterwards there was Compline and bed. There were also monthly retreat days and an annual retreat.

This prayer one came to see achieved two important results. Its regular rhythm carried one through the dry, hot days when without a regular pattern there would have been a danger of abandoning prayer in favour of the active work which always seemed so pressingly urgent. This prayer also shaped those who shared it into a strong community.

Most of this life of prayer was carried out before the days of liturgical revision and under the accepted theory that there was a single standard of liturgical prayer achieved at some time in the past and waiting rediscovery. It was also before the days when any need was felt to examine the prayer forms of the non-Christian religions. One may regret that there was not greater freedom to experiment with forms of prayer more suited to the needs of the Society in its Indian environment and that more attention was not given to Indian forms of contemplative prayer; but in those days the hour for this adventure had not come and it was sufficient that the Fathers should have been found faithful. This indeed they were and perhaps it is out of their past faithfulness that the present adventurous growth in new ways of prayer is taking place.

The call to this exploration was sounded by the Lambeth Conference in 1968. In the report it was agreed that one of the most important ways of renewing the Church in faith was through prayer and contemplation; and the need to learn to keep still and listen to God was emphasized. It was pointed out that this involved fostering each man's capacity for contemplation and a further direction was given that in this field there was much to learn from the approach of oriental religions to silence.

No one who has stood outside the mysterious Buddhist caves at Karla or visited the Bhaja Lena caves on the other side of the hill or talked to Indian men of prayer can have any doubt of the need to approach with humble receptivity the teaching of the oriental prayer forms used in India.

It may well be that our Christian forms of prayer may develop through contact with these other forms. It is even more certain that these oriental forms await that renewal and reformation which must come from their closer contact with Christian forms. Such a work which can be done through sympathetic understanding and from a distance might well be the way in which the work begun by the Society of St John the Evangelist in India may increase and be glorified. The call to embark on this work has been given and already there are signs that it has been heard.<sup>1</sup>

Some weeks ago we had the privilege of a visit from a Buddhist lama in exile from his home country in Tibet. He came with some anxiety that perhaps we might, as he put it, want to change him. When we had reassured him on that point, he quickly became a member of the family, insisted on taking his share in the community life and was obviously at home. Before he left he was asked to lead the family in meditation. Without any words, he sat in perfect stillness in our chapel and for a half-hour took us into the centre of his prayer and revealed to us how such silence not only discloses the incomprehensible God but also binds us in him in love. He then left us to continue his pilgrimage, but not without having opened a door which was already ajar and shewing through that opening a road which may well lead to the continuation of a work begun and eventually to its completion.

<sup>1</sup> Appendix.

# 11

## *The End of the Beginning*

The Society always intended that eventually the work begun in India should be transferred and Indian Christians be given a full independence to manage it themselves. It was only a question of when and this was answered by events both within and outside the Society.

The outside events which sounded the trumpet were those which culminated in the granting of political independence in 1947. Independence brought to a premature development a situation which many thought would not have happened for another fifty years. From that moment it was clear that a transfer of all missionary work to the diocese was a matter of extreme urgency.

But after independence there followed a series of perplexing symptoms which made it appear that the time for transfer was not yet. India was fully engaged in solving her own political and economic problems: it seemed irresponsible to add to these problems by passing over complicated institutions to local management. Further, the Indian government had made it clear that it welcomed professional and largely unpaid labour in its welfare and educational services, especially as at this time there were few signs of a competent succession of Indians to take over the burden.

So, in spite of the 1947 trumpet call, the Society, with many other missionary agencies, hesitated and delayed the day of transfer.

However, another symptom began to appear. This was a grow-

ing movement for independence among Indian Christians. Parish priests were no longer content to act as dependent curates to wealthy missionary societies. In schools and hospitals, it became increasingly clear that the staff should be led by one of their own country and the pressure towards this kind of independence grew and began to affect the discipline and relationship with the government authorities.

But it was the events within the Society itself which removed finally all uncertainty about timing. For some years, the novitiate had declined in numbers. This made the Society a diminishing body, unable adequately to reinforce its overseas missionary work. Father Bean was the last recruit to be sent out as a permanent reinforcement, and he came about 1950. When Father Whitworth was withdrawn in 1949, it was clear that some considerable retrenchment would be needed. Then came the comparatively early death of Father Williams in 1952. Obviously some radical readjustment would have to be made.

This took place in March 1955, when the management of St Peter's school and hostel, Bombay, was transferred to an Indian board of governors. In the next year the Fathers withdrew from Bombay and their mission house was handed over to the school.

In 1956, the first step was taken towards the handing over to the diocese of the Indian parishes, until then under the control of the Society. A scheme of diocesanization was drawn up and an endowment fund of £13,000 established for the support of the transferred parishes.

Meanwhile in England the Society was examining its present and future commitments. In 1963 a conference of all superiors was held at the mother house, Oxford, where it was decided that, although no immediate action was needed, the work and staff available could only just be balanced and any further changes would require drastic reorganization. A crisis came a few months afterwards with the sudden death of Father Gardner, the South African Provincial Superior. It was clear that the time for drastic action had come.

This action was decided by a Special General Chapter held on 26

December 1964. At this chapter the following resolutions were unanimously passed:

1. Father Slade was authorized to negotiate with the Bombay Diocesan Trust Association for the transfer of all property in India held for the Society by the St John the Evangelist Trust Association Ltd.
2. He was instructed to transfer to other management by 1 June 1965 all institutions run by the Fathers in India.
3. An Educational Endowment Fund was offered to the diocese on terms to be arranged with the diocese of Bombay.

In January 1965 Father Slade went to India to carry out these decisions and after much discussion and delay a scheme of transfer was drawn up and authorized by the Bombay Civil Court in September 1965. This brought about the transfer of all the Society's property in India to the Bombay Diocesan Trust Association and the setting up of an Education Endowment Fund. The Bishop of Bombay was made visitor of these trusts so that the appointment of managing trustees was left in his hands. At the same time negotiations were carried out for the transfer of the management of St Edward's school and St John's hostel, Poona, and St John's school, Kirkee. These were concluded and the transfer completed on 1 June 1965.

So came to fruition a slowly-maturing plan by which the Society allowed its own work in India to decrease in order that our Lord's work might increase. By laying down what had formed the heart of its life in India for more than eighty years it prepared itself to respond to the new tasks which we can be sure our Lord will give. This was the end of a period of rich and rewarding service, finally concluded in June 1967, when the remaining Fathers in India returned to the mother house.

The decision to return, like the other major decisions, came as a result of a clear indication from outside. This time it was the sudden and unexpected death of Father Huntley, one of the most energetic Fathers of the Society, around whom had grown up a missionary activity no other Father could hope to maintain. His death made it clear that the time had come to bring the Indian



work of the Society to an end. But this ending was also the beginning of a new kind of work whose outlines are still uncertain.

At the time when the work of transfer was completed, the following words were written under the heading of New Tasks. They still seem to have much relevance and so they are repeated as a conclusion to this account of a work which is finding in its end a new beginning:

If one needs to be up-to-date to speak about India at all, one certainly needs to be prophetic to speak with any confidence about the future. In thinking of the new tasks of the Society in India therefore restraint is needed and much must at this stage be hidden. There are two things one can say with confidence:

1. The transfer of property and management has not brought our work in India to an end. Provided God gives us the increase of numbers, this transfer has opened up new opportunities of service more fruitful than the old. We are not the only people certain of this. The Bishop of Bombay is very keen that the Society should continue its life in India and already there are signs of new kinds of work being offered now that the Fathers are free from the burden of local supervision.

2. Of all the possibilities before us in the future that of being the instruments for building up a community of men serving God in the religious life is the most exciting. This would not be a question merely of reproducing our own form of the religious life, but of being the means of guiding Indian young men to adventure into a form of their own. Perhaps this is what God is most trying to teach us through the present examination of the forms of the religious life which is going on in the west. And although it is dangerous to be too definite at this stage about the existence of aspirants for this life there are some strong pulls on the line to reassure those who are sensitive that the vocation is being considered.

The immediate present is a task of thankful waiting. It is also a task of preparation. This must lead to another beginning of joy, with the opportunity of still further work in that Indian part of God's kingdom.

## *Appendix*

On 31 January 1969 at the Anchorhold, Haywards Heath, the Society of St John the Evangelist opened a house for an exploratory venture in new forms of community and prayer. It was described as "A home of growing prayer in body, heart, and mind", and is still growing strongly.

The community form of life aims at producing the conditions of a Christian home, made up of a small nucleus of permanent members, living under the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience with what might be called a fluctuating perimeter of all kinds of people. Those who have lived in India will see in this pattern something resembling the Indian type of community called an Ashram.

The prayer of this family is drawn from both non-Christian and Christian sources. The main non-Christian source is the eightfold path to contemplation outlined in the *Yoga-sutras* of Patanjali. This has been adapted and supplied with suitable images for western people and is proving a valuable guideline for growth in contemplative prayer by many who are learning to use it. The main Christian source of prayer is the growing theology of the Catholic Church, as prayerfully expressed in the divine office and the eucharist. Again there is in this prayer an attempt to explore the ways of contemplation used in India and to harmonize them, as far as is possible, with the many and various forms of this prayer in the West.

In his introduction to Klaus Klostermaier's delightful book,



*Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban*<sup>1</sup>, Dr John V. Taylor writes: "It is an enormous adventure to try to follow his thought as it presses on into the new meanings which he finds in the Lord Jesus. For always it is the love for Christ which constrains him, identified with, yet surpassing, his love for the mind of India."

Some such constraint binds together the small family at the Anchorhold, where people of many races, including Indians themselves, people of many religions or almost none at all, explore together and discover still more of the immeasurable riches of Jesus Christ. This is a continuation of a work begun and one day perhaps it will need another book to describe how the work begun grew into a work continued under the conditions of the Anchorhold and grew nearer to the glory of a work finished by him.

<sup>1</sup> *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban*, Klaus Klostermeier, S.C.M., 1969.